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**God's Chosen People:  
Protestant Narratives of Korean Americans and  
American National Identity**

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**God's Chosen People:  
Protestant Narratives of Korean Americans and  
American National Identity**

**by**

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**Dissertation**

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## **Dedication**

To my husband Jin-Young, my son Yi-Chan, my parents and my in-laws.

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**God's Chosen People:  
Protestant Narratives of Korean Americans and  
American National Identity**

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Soo-Young Lee, Ph. D.

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Supervisor: Mark C. Smith

This dissertation examines Protestant narratives of post-1965 Korean American Christians, with regard to the formation of what it means to be Korean Americans. The focus of this dissertation is to find out how Korean Americans have reinterpreted their ethnic backgrounds and immigrant experiences in America based on the concept of God's chosen people in religious terms. They use this Christian identity for distinguishing themselves not only from Koreans but also from other minority groups in America.

The chapter starts with an overview of the historical background of Korean Americans' pre-immigrant perspectives of America. Throughout Korea's history of despair under the colonization by Japan and the civil war followed by the national division, America has gained political, military and cultural hegemony over Korea,



causing the emergence of so-called American fever, the idealization of American ways of life. This tendency motivated Korean Americans to leave their homeland for obtaining better social status and living conditions. These historical backgrounds have influenced the understanding of their post-immigrant lives in America.

The following chapters discuss how Korean Americans make sense of their immigrant lives under the changing social contexts in both Korea and America. Pursuant to that goal, they investigate Protestant narratives in the sermons of influential Korean American pastors, testimonies and articles published in church magazines. In these narratives, the Christian symbols such as pilgrimage and Exodus sanctified their immigration by interpreting their transnational immigration as a sacred journey into God's Promised Land which they believed was America. Furthermore, their identification with the American Puritans and their manifest destiny to revive Christianity in America demonstrate their racial attitudes toward non-Korean ethnic groups in America. The commemorative Centennial Celebration of the Korean American church held in November, 2003 in the last chapter also serves as a stage where people weave diverse factors together to establish their group identities.

For post-1965 Korean immigrants, Protestant narratives have contributed to the maintenance of Korean American identity as God's chosen people. They reflect the wish of Korean American to become a central group in mainstream American society as well as be part of American destiny as a global superpower, rather than to remain as a marginal group.

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## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

There is one most important thing that America is not able to do without Korean American Christians. It is to regain American Puritan faith and raise a spiritual awakening movement. America was founded upon Puritan faith and Judeo Christian values. These days, this country is collapsing, shaken from its foundation. It is experiencing an awful spiritual decay. We are desperate to have spiritual awakening and revival to heal this country. This is God's hope for Korean Americans.

God let His son die on the cross, bought our lives with the blood of Jesus, saved us, and we became His children only by His Grace. Then, do we have to live powerlessly as a minority or as onlookers in this land created by God! Is it God's wish for His children? We have to think deeply on His purpose and change our minority paradigm without hesitation. Who will own this land if we do not revive Puritan faith in America and reclaim this land as God's land? Do you want those who belong to the secular world to own this land? I'd rather die. We have a right and responsibility to regain the ownership.

Suppose that the owner of a company with 10,000 employees were a Korean American. Also suppose most employees were whites. If the owner ran the company with a sense of inferiority because of their racial minority status, what would happen to that company? Regardless of the color of the face, he is the owner and boss of that company. He is not a minority at all. He will do his best day and night for his company and for the welfare and security of his 10,000 employees, because he is the owner.<sup>1</sup>

Post-1965 Korean Americans arrived in the United States with rosy images of Americans as attractive and affluent whites. In addition, they dreamed of secure

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<sup>1</sup> This is an excerpt from an autobiographical book of Prof. John Kim who is a founder of a Korea American evangelical organization, JAMA(Jesus Awakening Movement for America). Kim, John C. *Hananimui Sowoneul Irugi Wihayeo (The Cry from the Heart for Fulfilling God's Wish)* Norwalk, California: Peter's House. 2003. p.41, 80-81.

middle class lives in the country where they believed anyone can achieve material success simply by working hard and getting an education. Decades of Korea-American relationships have nurtured those pre-immigrant expectations of Korean immigrants which laid the foundation for understanding their immigrant lives in America.

One of the distinguished characteristics of Korean Americans is the dominant influences of Protestant churches on Korean American communities. Statistically, 70 percent of Korean Americans are affiliated with Protestant churches in one way or another while only about 25 percent of the Korean population were reported to be Christians.<sup>2</sup> Considering the central functions of Protestant churches among Korean American communities, this study will examine their Protestant religious narratives in establishing what it means to be Korean Americans. Narratives provide the stories through which they can discover who they are and define their relationship to others in society. Therefore, their “patent fiction<sup>3</sup>” based on Protestant narratives reveals their ways of understanding their transnational movement and immigrant lives in America.

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<sup>2</sup> Kim, Kwang Chung. R. Stephen Warner. & Ho-Youn Kwon. ed. *Korean Americans and Their Religions: Pilgrims and Missionaries from a Different Shore*. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press. 2001. p.6.

<sup>3</sup> “Not of North America, for the prophecies stopped short at the Canadian and Mexican borders, but of a country that, despite its arbitrary territorial limits, could read its destiny in its landscape, and a population that, despite its bewildering mixture of race and creed, could believe in something called an American mission, and could invest that **patent fiction** with all the emotional, spiritual, and intellectual appeal of a religious quest.....”  
Bercovitch, Sacvan. *The American Jeremia*. Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978. p.11



Religion served as a powerful tool for Korean immigrants to imagine and to project their future beyond their particular ethnic backgrounds and minority status by providing a transcendent sacred reality for them. Therefore, Protestant narratives provide the framework for Korean immigrants to understand their lives in America by giving the Biblical meanings to their immigration. This process helps them to convince themselves and others that their choices were right and they are living valuable lives as “desirable” Americans. For this purpose, my dissertation maintains that their religious narratives situate them in the status of God’s chosen people who had been called to America which they believe is the Promised Land and who are on a sacred journey through God’s trials and tribulations. Furthermore, they have providential destiny as God’s chosen people to purify America and evangelize the world.

The idea of God’s chosen people in the Bible is based on the concept that God chooses a particular people or nation for His special mission. In the Old Testament of the Bible, God chose Jews for His people. Through the Bible, He blessed, punished, protected and gave promises for the future. This idea of God’s chosen people constitutes the basic faith of Korean American Christians. Then, my questions are “how does this concept of God’s chosen people relate to Korean American identities?” and “how does this narrative contribute to the formation of Korean American identities?” The answers to these questions will demonstrate how Korean immigrants promote their American identities without denying their distinctive Korean ethnicity. They did not come to America to be marginalized,

rather they keep seeking ways to become “owners” of America through their religion as John Kim is quoted in the beginning of this chapter.

## **I. SCOPE AND MATERIALS**

### **A. Scope**

My study draws on religious literature such as sermons and testimonies by Korean American Christian leaders and lay people. More specifically, my research focuses on post-1965 Korean immigrants affiliated with Korean American Protestant churches in the Los Angeles area. In other words, in my dissertation, I will discuss how the post-1965 Korean immigrants constitute what it means to be Korean Americans within the social contexts of the Los Angeles area and South Korea.

Although the history of Korean immigration is over one hundred years long, the population of Korean Americans remained small until the large influx of Korean immigrants resulting from the new immigration law in 1965.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, my study deals with post-1965 Korean immigrants. In addition, although my primary focus on the Los Angeles area may not be generalizable in arguing the characteristics of the entire Korean American population in the United States, I

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<sup>4</sup> I will talk about this in detail based on the specific demographical data of Korean immigration in Chapter 3.

selected the Los Angeles area for my research for several reasons. I expect my research focusing on the Los Angeles area to serve as the initial step toward understanding the entire Korean American population.

The primary reason I selected the Los Angeles area is that it has one of the largest concentrations of Korean immigrants in the United States.<sup>5</sup> Koreans jokingly refer to Los Angeles as one of the districts in Seoul when they explain their home addresses: Seoul Si(city), Na-Seong(Los Angeles) Gu(district).<sup>6</sup> This term implies that Koreans consider the Los Angeles Koreatown as an extension of Korean residency, as well as a symbolic community center for Korean Americans from all over the country. The large Korean American communities in the Los Angeles area enabled a few Korean American immigrant churches to develop into mega churches with several thousand attendees in Sunday worship. These big churches served as the most influential ethnic institutions and the religious leaders in these churches also performed as representatives of Korean American communities inside and outside those communities.

The 1992 Los Angeles Riot which was a unique experience for Korean Americans is another reason for my focus on the Los Angeles area. The L.A. Riot,

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<sup>5</sup> According to the 2000 census, 44 percent of Koreans in the U.S. are reported to live in the Western States in comparison with 22 percent for the general population. Furthermore, one fourth of Koreans in America are counted to reside in the Southern California metropolitan region called Los Angeles-Riverside-Orange, CA Consolidated Metropolitan Statistical Area(CMSA), recording 257,975 out of 1,076,872 Koreans in America in total which makes up 23.96 percent. According to the 2000 research by sociologist Eui-Young Yu and Peter Choe, there are approximately more than 28,000 Korean ethnic churches in the USA.

Yu, Eui-Young & Peter Choe, "Korean Population in the United States as Reflected in the Year 2000 U.S. Census." *Amerasia Journal* 30:3 (2003-2004): 2-21. p.11-13.

<sup>6</sup> "Si" and "Gu" are suffixes used in address forms in Korean.

which Koreans call *Sa-I-Gu*,<sup>7</sup> was an historic crisis in Korean immigration and caused Korean Americans to reflect on their status and realities in America, specifically in the Los Angeles area which is multiethnic and multiracial. In my research, the testimonies and interpretations of this crisis by Korean American Christians serve as crucial sources in examining their identity formation. Within the context of the L.A. Riot experiences, I will examine how the reactions of Korean American Christians to this riot reflect the ways in which they perceive themselves in relationship to non-Koreans around them.

Finally, my selection of Los Angeles results from my interest in the Centennial Celebration of Korean American Churches which was held in Los Angeles on November 9, 2003. This Centennial Celebration was held for the purpose of celebrating the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first Korean American church which was established in Hawaii in 1903. The pastors of Korean American churches in the Los Angeles area proposed this event with a sponsorship from a leading Korean American Christian magazine, *The Christian Herald*. Commemorative celebrations of ethnic groups promote group solidarity by facilitating various resources the participants can share.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, the materials

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<sup>7</sup> “Sa-I-Gu” means April, 29 in Korean language. Koreans tend to name the historic crises by the date of the incidents. For example, Koreans call the Korean War “Yuk-I-Oh” which means June 25, the date when the war broke out.

<sup>8</sup> For the studies of festivals, or commemorative celebration in the ethnic identity formation, there are a number of excellent studies. I will discuss this in detail in Chapter 5. Kurashige, Lon. *Japanese American Celebration and Conflict: A History of Ethnic Identity and Festival, 1934-1990*. Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press. 2002; Bodnar, John. *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. 1992; Schultz, April. “‘The Pride of the Race Has Been Touched’: The 1925 Norse-American Immigration Centennial and Ethnic Identity.” *Journal of*

and narratives used in photo collections, sermons and addresses in this celebration will serve as useful resources for my research.

## **B. Materials**

First of all, I took the Youngnak Presbyterian church of Los Angeles as the main source for my data. The church was named after Youngnak Presbyterian church in Seoul, South Korea<sup>9</sup> because most of its founding members attended Youngnak in Seoul before they immigrated to America. Most former Youngnak members attended the current Korean United Presbyterian Church of Los Angeles<sup>10</sup> located near the University of Southern California. However, they wanted to found

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*American History*. Vol. 77. No. 3. (Mar. 1991):1265-1295; Orsi, Robert A. *The Madonna of 115<sup>TH</sup> Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880-1950*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. 1985; Duntley, Madeline. "Heritage, Ritual, and Translation; Seattle's Japanese Presbyterian Church." Orsi, Robert A. ed. *Gods of the City : Religion and the American Urban Landscape*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press. 1999:289-309.

<sup>9</sup> *Youngnak* is currently one of the biggest churches in Seoul, which was founded in 1945.

<sup>10</sup> The Korean United Presbyterian Church of LA was founded in 1906 with the support of the Presbyterian Church of USA. It was not until 1928 when Rev. Jung-Su Kim became responsible for the church as a senior pastor that American interim pastors were in charge of the church. After Korean immigrants took over the leadership of this church, the church moved to the current location on Jefferson blvd. near the University of Southern California. Due to its location, this church is sometimes referred to as Jefferson Presbyterian Church. It is currently a small congregation with only 100 attendees. ( <http://www.kupcla.com> ) For the reference of the early Korean American immigrant churches before 1965, see Na-Seong Youngnak Gyohoe (Youngnak Church of Los Angeles). *Na-Seong Youngnak Gyohoe Isimnyeonsa (Twenty Years' History of Youngnak Presbyterian Church of Los Angeles)*. Los Angeles, CA: Hanbamu Sorisa (Voice Publishings). 1996. p.91-92; Ryu, Joseph. "Korean Immigrant Churches and the PC(USA)" Lee, Sang Hyun & John V. Moore. ed. *Korean American Ministry: A Resource Book*. Louisville, KY: General Assembly Council Presbyterian Church (USA). 1987. p.25-27; Patterson, Wayne, *The Ilse: First-Generation Korean Immigrants in Hawaii, 1903-1973*. Honolulu, Hawaii: Center for Korean Studies. 2000.

a new church with the intention of continuing the tradition of Youngnak in Seoul. As a result, they founded Youngnak of LA and held the first service at the apartment of Kwan-Jeong Oh, one of the founding members, on March 4<sup>th</sup> of 1973.<sup>11</sup> Since then, it has grown into a mega-church with more than five thousand in attendance every Sunday.<sup>12</sup> Youngnak church is located on 11 acres in the northern part of Los Angeles, a few miles west of Interstate Highway 5 and east of 110. Youngnak provides a model of successful immigrant ministries and an example of church-based community service and missionary work.

Church publications by Youngnak Presbyterian Church of Los Angeles were some of my major sources in this dissertation. In May of 1981, it started publishing a church magazine, *Hanmaeum*<sup>13</sup> which contains the writings of church members and pastors. Youngnak has published this magazine every three months on average and collected testimonies, personal life stories, poems, letters, news and columns about various subjects. Another of its publications is the monthly newsletter, *Youngnak News*, which contains news and information as well as testimonies and opinions.

In addition, my research closely analyzed sermons by two influential Korean American pastors: Rev. Kye-Yong Kim and Rev. Dong-Sun Lim. Rev. Kim served as the first senior pastor of Youngnak Presbyterian church of Los Angeles

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<sup>11</sup> Na-Seong Youngnak Gyohoe (Youngnak Church of Los Angeles), *Ibid.*, p.104.

<sup>12</sup> It is reported that among the attendees, there are 3,500 adults, 1000 Youth and Children and 1000 English Ministry members every Sunday.

<sup>13</sup> In Korean, it has two meanings because of the word *Han*. *Han* means either “big” or “one.” Then, *maeum* means “heart.” So *Hamaeum* could mean “big heart” or “one heart.”

until 1988 and as a pastor emeritus in the same church until he passed away in 1990 at the age of 68. Rev. Lim founded another big Korean American church, the Oriental Mission Church, near the Los Angeles Koreatown in 1970.<sup>14</sup> Lim served this church for twenty years as the senior pastor and for five years as the pastor emeritus. Currently, the Oriental Mission Church has grown into one of the biggest Korean American churches in America along with Youngnak.<sup>15</sup> In particular, Lim delivered the main sermon in the Centennial Celebration of Korean American churches in 2003, which will be part of my studies.

Lastly, I have collected the materials of the Centennial Celebration of the Korean American Churches: the photo collections displayed during the celebration, the sermon transcripts, messages, prospectus papers, and posters and letters. The examination of these materials will illustrate how Korean Americans constituted their identities as Americans by commemorating their ethnic backgrounds and cultural resources based on their common historical and social context.

Some of these materials mentioned above are written in Korean and I have translated all the Korean texts. In my study, a multilingual reading is significant for understanding culturally signified meanings within two different languages and

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<sup>14</sup> “30 believers sharing evangelical Christian faith gathered on July 26, 1970, at the address 926 South Irolo Street, Los Angeles (Rev. Dong-Sun Lim’s house) and founded the church promising their efforts for missions, education, and dedication to the society.” in Kang, Choon-Min Joshua. *Dongyang Seongyo Gyohoe Samsipnyeonsa (30-Year History of The Oriental Mission Church)*. 2002. p.92.

<sup>15</sup> It is reported to have roughly 5,000 attendees every Sunday, including English Ministry and Youth Groups. ([www.omic.org](http://www.omic.org))

cultural backgrounds.<sup>16</sup> In this sense, my bilingual ability in Korean and English contributed to my research.

## II. CHAPTER OUTLINES

This dissertation begins with overviews of the historical background of Korean Americans' pre-immigrant perceptions of America based on Korea-American relationships. Throughout a century long relationship between the two countries, the influences of American missionaries, Japanese colonization, and modernization of pro-American South Korea contributed to the establishment of Koreans' initial ideas about America and their pre-immigrant perceptions influenced how they make sense of their post-immigrant lives in America.

Based on this understanding of the basic pre-immigrant perceptions of Korean Americans, the third chapter examines how Protestant narratives of Korean American Christians in the 1970s and 1980s interpret their immigrant experiences in religious terms, focusing on the religious symbols and narratives used by the two influential Korean American Protestant leaders: Rev. Kye-Yong Kim and Rev. Dong-Sun Lim. In the messages of the two pastors, their applications of the Biblical story to the transnational immigrant experiences of Korean Americans created the

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<sup>16</sup> As Werner Sollers argued in his collection of essays, *Multilingual America: Transnationalism, Ethnicity, and the Languages of American Literature*. (1998), multilingual perspectives have been neglected by scholars of ethnic communities no matter whether they are conservatives, or radicals even in the debate of multiculturalism. Therefore, this multilingual perspective should be considered from the point of view of an "English plus" approach rather than "English only." Sollers, Werner. ed. *Multilingual America: Transnationalism, Ethnicity, and the Languages of American Literature*. New York: New York University Press. 1998. p.1-13.



image of America as the present Canaan and God's Promised Land, and themselves as God's chosen people who are on a sacred pilgrimage journey. The Korean immigrants of those periods experienced extreme poverty after thirty five years of colonization and three years of civil war and political unrest from authoritarian regimes. In addition to the difficult historical memories of Korean history, American influences on Korean modernization provided the basis for their religious narratives. This sanctification of their immigration accommodated the desire of Korean immigrants to settle successfully in America and transcend the antagonistic cultures between their home country and the host society in the establishment of their identities.

The idealization of America as the present Canaan based on the disparity between Korea and America has gone through transformation by the changing historical contexts. South Korean economic development reduced the gaps in living conditions between the two countries and enabled South Koreans to achieve middle-class lives which marked the American Dream of Korean immigrants. Furthermore, the Los Angeles Riot in 1992 shattered the naïve belief of Korean immigrants that America is an ideal society of immigrants. The fourth chapter investigates how Protestant religious narratives react to this transformation and situate Korean Americans within the context of multiracial and multiethnic American society. Reflecting the pre-immigrant racial perceptions of Korean immigrants, Protestant narratives reflect Korean Americans' resistance to being treated as just one of the marginalized minorities or being subsumed into the category of Asian Americans. Rather they promote unique identity as the second

Puritans in American society based on the Korean historical tradition and the numerically large number of Christian churches among Korean American communities.

The final chapter makes a case of the Centennial Celebration of Korean American churches held in Los Angeles in November of 2003, which commemorated the centennial year of the foundation of the first Korean American Protestant church in 1903. The ethnic festival serves as a stage where people share their group solidarity by weaving diverse factors together and where they establish their identity as Americans. Since this celebration was an evangelical religious event, Christian narratives became the tool for the participants to promote their ethnic American identities. Through the examination of messages, sermons, festivals and photo exhibitions during the Centennial Celebration, this chapter illustrates how Korean Americans establish their distinctive identities as Korean Americans based on their Protestant religious background.

### **III. MAIN GOALS**

#### **A. Korean American Studies**

I expect my study of Korean American Protestant narratives to contribute not only to the expansion of Korean American studies within the area of Asian American studies but also to the understanding of the relationship between American national identity and religious narratives.

First of all, my study of Korean American Protestant narratives aims at deepening and expanding the range of the studies of Korean American Protestantism. After Korean immigrants became one of the fastest growing immigrant groups as a result of the immigration policy reform in 1965, literature on Korean Americans increased in the fields of ethnic and race studies including Asian American studies. Considering the importance of Korean American Protestant churches in the lives of Korean Americans, many scholars have accumulated studies about Korean American churches.

Sociologists have paid attention to the institutional functions of Korean American churches. For instance, sociologist of Asian Americans Pyung-Gap Min suggested three functions of the Korean-American Church: providing fellowship for Korean immigrants, maintaining Korean cultural tradition and providing social status and positions for adult Korean immigrants who experienced downward social mobility after their immigration.<sup>17</sup> However, his type of approach has the limitation of dealing with churches as just one of the social institutions and neglecting the religious functions of churches. Also, his research limited his analysis of the roles of Protestant churches within their own communities and failed to consider how they contributed to the understanding of their identities as Americans with Korean ethnic heritage.

In addition, sociologists Jung-Ha Kim and Ai-Ra Kim focused on the relationship between churches and Korean-American women based on a feminist

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<sup>17</sup> Min, Pyung-Gap, "The Structure and Social Functions of Korean Immigrant churches in the United States," *International Migration Review* 26: 4 (December, 1992): 1370-1394.

approach.<sup>18</sup> This approach attained scholarly attention because little research has dealt with women in church even though the majority of Korean-American church attendants are women. A contribution of this approach is to provide a way to understand Korean-American churches from the point of view of gender issues. Ai-Ra Kim argues that Korean American women experience their identity conflicts as both women under patriarchy in churches and as a racial minority under racism in America.<sup>19</sup> She suggests, however, that churches help Korean American women to negotiate their identity conflicts by participating in church activities. According to Kim, churches serve as social agents for Korean American women to resist sexism and racism, pursuing both Americanization and Koreanization. In short, she presents the conditions of the “churched Korean American women” as not only victims of Korean patriarchy and American racism, but also as liberators from these social barriers through church participation. Even if this type of research brought attention to gender identity as well as ethnic identity of Korean American women in churches, it tends only to consider women’s participation in church activities, rather than the perceptions about women within Korean American Christianity and their reactions to those religious perspectives toward gender issues.

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<sup>18</sup> Her research about the roles of churches to Korean women immigrants is shown in Kim, Jung Ha. “The Labor of Compassion: Voices of ‘Churched’ Korean-American Women,” *Amerasia Journal* 22:1 (1996) and *Bridge-Makers and Cross-Breakers: Korean-American Women and the Church*. Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press. 1997. Also see Kim, Ai Ra, “The Religious Factor in the Adaptation of Korean Immigrants ‘Ilse’ Women in Life in America,” Ph.D. Dissertation, Drew University, 1991; Kim, Ai Ra. *Women Struggling for a NewLife*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press. 1996.

<sup>19</sup> Kim, Ai Ra. 1996. *Ibid.*

There is also research on how Korean American churches psychologically influence Korean immigrant lives in their adjustment to the host society. Theologian Andrew Sung Park's study shows an example of this approach.<sup>20</sup> He analyzes the psychological healing process of Korean Americans through their Protestant faith. In his books, Park suggested that Korean Americans should pursue *Hahn*,<sup>21</sup> by adopting a Korean traditional emotional intimacy concept, *Jung*, through their Christian fellowship. According to his argument, Korean Americans can experience psychological healing of the trauma they had as immigrants because they feel safe in their Christian fellowship based on the interaction between Korean unique feelings and Christian concepts of human relations. Despite his thoughtful research about how churches perform psychological healing functions, Park gives little attention to Protestant religious faith based on God's word as a factor in comforting Korean American Christians.

Based on the components of the scholarly efforts discussed above, my purpose is to supplement the prior research on Korean American Protestant churches. In fact, I am concerned that due to the popularity of the academic interests of Korean American Protestantism, my project may give the impression that it is just another Korean American Protestantism study. However, the distinctiveness of my project from the prior research is grounded in integrating the ethnic identity and their American national identity based on their religious faith.

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<sup>20</sup> Park, Andrew Sung, *Racial Conflict and Healing: an Asian-American Theological Perspective*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books. 1996; Park, Andrew Sung. *The Wounded Heart of God: The Asian Concept of Han and the Christian Doctrine of Sin*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press. 1993.

Their religious narratives adopted from evangelical Christianity provide the framework for Korean Americans to become “desirable” Americans and Korean ethnic heritage becomes the essential element in their stories.

## **B. Asian American Studies**

The racial and historical distinctiveness of Asian Americans demands a close consideration of their situations in American society.<sup>22</sup> In U.S. immigration history, there were three major legal decisions which influenced Asian-American immigration. The first was the Chinese Exclusion law of 1882<sup>23</sup> which demonstrated racial hostility toward Asian immigrants in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in America. Then, the Reed Johnson Immigration Act was declared in 1924. This legislation limited the number of admitted immigrants to 2% of the number of people from that country who were already living in the United States in 1890 based on Census data from that year. As a result, this law excluded most Asian immigrants except for Filipino immigrants because America annexed the

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<sup>21</sup> In Korean, *Hahn* means “oneness” or “unity.”

<sup>22</sup> About the overall history of Asian-Americans, see Okihiro, Gary Y. *The Columbia Guide to Asian-American History*. New York: Columbia University Press. 2001; Daniel, Roger & Harry Kitano. *Asian-Americans; Emerging Minorities*. Englewood, NJ: Prentice Hall. 1995; Takaki, Ronald T. *From Different Shore : Perspectives on Race and Ethnicity in America*. New York: Oxford University Press. 1987; Takaki, Ronald T. *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans*. Boston, MA: Little, Brown. 1989.

<sup>23</sup> This law restricted the immigration of Chinese laborers for ten years, declaring Chinese ineligible for citizenship. This law was completely repealed in 1943. Reimers, David M. *Unwelcome Strangers: American Identity and the Turn Against Immigration*. New York: Columbia University Press. 1998. p.12. For more about this law, see Gyory, Andrew. *Closing the Gate: Race, Politics, and the Chinese Exclusion Act*. Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press. 1998.

Philippines during that period.<sup>24</sup> However, the Hart-Cellar Act, established in 1965, dramatically changed the legal conditions of Asian immigrants by phasing out the national origins quota system. Accordingly, this legislation created the foundation of today's immigration law and motivated the recent growth of the Asian American population.<sup>25</sup>

As an eventual result, the 1990 census reported that there were 7.2 million Asian Pacific Islander Americans, constituting 2.9 percent of the total U.S. population. This census indicated that the Asian-American population had increased by three times since 1970.<sup>26</sup> In addition, some demographers proposed that there would be over 20 million Asian-Americans by 2020.<sup>27</sup> In this rapid population expansion of Asian-Americans in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, the most important distinctive characteristic is the increasing number of immigrants from Asian countries other than China and Japan which made up most of the early Asian immigrants. As a result of this law, Filipino, Korean, Asian Indian and Southeast

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<sup>24</sup> Reimers, David M. *Ibid.* p. 14. For the reference about legal cases to show how race was applied to Asian-American naturalization cases, see Lesser J. "Always 'Outsider': Asians, Naturalization, and the Supreme Court," *12 Amerasia* 83. (1985-1986). and Haney-Lopez, Ian. *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race*. New York: New York University Press, 1996.

<sup>25</sup> The 1965 Immigration reforms changed the legal conditions of Asian immigration, accepting 20,000 immigrants from each Asian country and also allowing the invitation of family members on a non quota basis. Also, the preference system toward professionals resulted in the increase of Asian immigration. The increase rate of Asian-Americans is even higher than the Hispanic. While the increase rate of the Hispanic population between 1970 and 1980 was 38 percent, that of Asians during the same period was 143 percent. Takaki, Ronald, 1989. *Op. Cit.*, p.5.

<sup>26</sup> Fong, Timothy P. *Asian-Americans: Experiences and Perspectives*, Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall. 2000. p. 1.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

Asian immigrants comprised over 90 percent of the total number of Asian immigrants in 1971.<sup>28</sup>

This increasing diversity and population expansion of Asian-Americans motivated the growth of the academic field of Asian-American Studies. This academic attention to Asian Americans allows me to connect my research about Korean American Protestantism to larger projects in terms of Asian-American Studies as well as American Studies.

The goal of this study is to depart from the superficial homogenization of Asian Americans in the academic fields of ethnic studies. This limitation of Asian American studies has overlooked the diversity within each Asian American group and the focus of scholars has been on the examination of commonalities among Asian Americans. However, my study will suggest how Korean American Christians promote American identities based on their Korean ethnic backgrounds independently of Asian American identities. In this sense, I expect my study to expand Asian American studies within the field of American Studies.

Furthermore, my study will avoid essentializing Korean ethnic characteristics which are regarded as non-Christian based on a popular stereotypical description of Asian-Americans. In America which is considered to be a Christian country, Asian religions tend to be connected to the creation of foreign images of Asian-Americans. Oliver Stone's movie *Heaven and Earth*<sup>29</sup> illustrates the popular

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid* p.20.

<sup>29</sup> *Heaven and Earth* (1993) is Oliver Stone's movie which is made based on the two volumes of autobiography, *Heaven and Earth Changed Places* and *Child or War, Woman of Peace*, written by a



use of Asian-American religion. In this movie, the images of the religion of Le Ly, who is a Vietnamese immigrant in the U.S., are vividly represented by portraying her Buddhist worship scenes. Also throughout the movie, her life in the U.S. is strongly influenced by the advice of a Buddhist monk. Through these representations of Le Ly, this movie shows how Buddhism, a common Asian religion, is used as a popular strategy to symbolize the differences of Asian Americans.

Religious scholar Laurence Moore argued in his book that “Religious Outsiders” from various religions, or those from American creations such as Jehovah's Witnesses, have been absorbed into American society which is growing more multicultural.<sup>30</sup> According to him, Asian Americans establish their American identities by practicing and maintaining their Asian heritage. In other words, he proposes that under a multicultural society, to be ethnic means to be an American. However, Moore still portrays the religions of Asian Americans to be foreign.

Recently, there is research overcoming stereotypical Asian religions, examining the adoption of American evangelical Christianity by Asian American Christians as a way to negotiate their racial identity and American identity.<sup>31</sup>

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Vietnamese woman named Le Ly Hayslip. She met an American GI during the Vietnam war and immigrated to America.

<sup>30</sup> Moore, R. Laurence, *Religious Outsiders and the Making of Americans*, New York: Oxford University Press. 1986. p.21

<sup>31</sup> Busto, Rudy V. “The Gospel According to the Model Minority?: Hazardous Interpretation of Asian-American Evangelical College Students,” *Amerasia Journal*, 22:1 (1996):133-147; Alumkal, Antony W. *Asian American Evangelical Churches: Race, Ethnicity, and Assimilation in the Second Generation*. New York: LFB Scholarly Publishing LLC; 2003; Ecklund, Elaine Howard. “Models of Civic Responsibility: Korean Americans in Congregations with Different Ethnic Compositions,

Religious Sociologist Rudy Busto argued that the increasing activities and participation in Christian missions by Asian-American college students played their roles as agencies to create Asian-American identities. Furthermore, their increasing members in Christianity implied the actual increase of number of Asian-American students on college campuses, one of the phenomena relating to the model minority myth.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, Asian-American college students could establish their identities as a model minority through Christian evangelical activities.

As in Busto's research, historian Alumkal Anthony also investigated the influence of American evangelical Christians in the identity formation of Asian American second generations: Chinese and Korean Americans. Alumkal argues that the second generation Asian Americans have adopted American mainstream evangelical Christianity as a way to transcend their ethnic identities. Through participation in American evangelical Christian activities, they establish their American identities beyond their distinctive ethnic backgrounds.

In addition, sociologist Elaine Ecklund showed how evangelical Christian resources are used for the Korean American second generation to create their racial and ethnic identities distinctive from non-Korean ethnic groups. For this purpose, Ecklund analyzed the perceptions about civic responsibility shown among the

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*Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 44:1 (2005): 15-28; Ecklund, Elaine Howard, *Korean American Evangelicals: New Models of Civic Life*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.

<sup>32</sup> Model minority myth is a conservative popular image of Asian-Americans as a successful minority who can be a model to other minorities, especially blacks. This discourse was initiated by the two articles which praised the successes of Japanese and Chinese immigrants in America. They are William Peterson, "Success story, Japanese-American Style." *New York Times Magazines*. (January 9, 1966) p.20-21, 33, 36, 38, 40-41. 43 and "Success story of One Minority in America" *U.S. News and World Report*. (December 26, 1966) p.73-78.

second generation Korean American college students who attend Protestant churches. Ecklund selected two different groups, one of whom attends the English Ministry within a Korean ethnic church and the other of whom goes to the Protestant churches made up of multiple ethnic groups. Ecklund analyzed their use of religious discourses over the issue of civil responsibility for the purpose of examining how each group of second generation Korean Americans promoted their Korean American identities.

The research examined above is dealing with one or two particular Asian groups individually and shows that each group seems to develop their own Christianity based on the mainstream American evangelical Christianity rather than establishing a pan-Asian version of Christianity. Therefore, for Asian-Americans, Christianity has been represented as a dominant cultural agency of the U.S. and is engaged in the “acculturation” process to adopt the “American way of life and values.”

In this sense, my goal is to examine the Korean American version of Christianity in establishing their American identities rather than Asian American identities. In this process, their Christian narratives reinterpret their particular ethnic background and immigrant experiences and Korean ethnic heritage becomes a fundamental factor of having providential destiny to be “desirable” Americans, rather than something which would be given up. Therefore, my study is expected to expand Asian American studies into part of the study of American national identity formation.

### C. Religious Narratives

My study aims at contributing to the studies of the religious literature and narratives relating to the construction of symbolic meaning of what it means to be Americans. The functions of religious narratives centered on the particular group relating to American national identity have been central issues among American historians. For instance, in the early history of the New England colonies, the Puritan religious leaders created on “errand into the wilderness” as a symbolic destiny for the early Puritan immigrants. John Winthrop’s famous sermon and the image of America as “city on the hill” is a good example of the use of religious language in the construction of American national identity in early history.<sup>33</sup>

In addition, English professor Joanna Brooks analyzed the religious literature of the early African Americans and Native Americans as a way to see how people of color developed their identities using Christian discourses.<sup>34</sup> Brooks discussed her arguments within the context of the story of Christian redemption and regeneration represented by Lazarus in the Bible. In her research, the sermons and religious literature provided the resources for her discussion. In addition, in the field of African American studies, many scholars have conducted studies of

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<sup>33</sup> Cherry, Conrad ed. *God’s New Israel: Religious Interpretations of American Destiny*. Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press. 1998.

<sup>34</sup> Brooks, Joanna. *American Lazarus : religion and the rise of African-American and Native American literatures*, New York: Oxford University Press. 2003.

theological interpretations of slave history and the racial oppression experiences of African Americans using Christian discourses for their identity construction.<sup>35</sup>

About Asian Americans, anthropologist Palinkas Lawrence examined the rhetoric of Chinese Christians in establishing their Chinese American identities and historian David Yoo collected articles dealing with religious narratives of Asian Americans.<sup>36</sup> The afore mentioned research provides valuable documents for comprehending the profound analysis of how Asian Americans rearticulate their experiences in religious terms. Therefore, my study of Korean American Protestant narratives will diversify the research of how different racial and ethnic groups reinterpret their particular experiences in religious terms and transfer them into a vehicle for developing of their American national identity.

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<sup>35</sup> Voluminous research on African American Christianity and theological interpretations of African American history includes, Eddie S. Glaude, Jr. *Exodus! : Religion, Race, and Nation in Early Nineteenth-Century Black America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 2000 ; Lincoln, C. Eric & Lawrence Mamiya. *The Black Church in the African American Experience*. Durham: Duke University Press. 1990; Lincoln, C. Eric. *The Negro Pilgrimage in America: The Coming of Age of the Black Americans*. New York: Bantam Books. 1969; Eddie S. Glaude, Jr. "Myth and African American Self-Identity." Prentiss, Craig R. ed. *Religion and the Creation of Race and Ethnicity: An Introduction*. New York: New York University Press. 2003:28-42 ; Taylor, Robert Joseph & Michael C. Thornton & Linda M. Chatters. "Black Americans' Perceptions of the Sociohistorical Role of the Church," *Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 2(Dec., 1987):123-138; Pinn, Anthony B. ed. *Moral Evil and Redemptive Suffering: A History of Theodicy in African-American Religious Thought*. Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida. 2002.

<sup>36</sup> Palinkas, Lawrence A. *Rhetoric and Religious Experience: The Discourse of Immigrant Chinese Churches*. Fairfax, Virginia: George Mason University Press. 1989; Yoo, David K. ed. *A New Spiritual Homes: Religion and Asian Americans*. Honolulu, Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press. 1999.

For further research on Asian American narratives, refer to Chong, Kelly H. "What it Means to Be Christian: The Role of Religion in the Construction of Ethnic Identity and Boundary Among Second-Generation Korean Americans." *Sociology of Religion*. 59. (Fall, 1998) : 259-286; Fernandez, Eleazar S. "Exodus-toward- Egypt.: Filipino-American's Struggle to Realize the Promised Land in America." Fernandez, Eleazar S. & Fernando F. Segovia. Ed. *A Dream Unfinished: Theological Reflections on American from the Margins*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books. 2001:167-184.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Historian Oscar Handlin's *The Uprooted* says: "Once I thought to write a history of the immigrants in America. Then I discovered that the immigrants were American history."<sup>37</sup> As Handlin noted, the United States has been founded and developed with an immigration history which includes multiple groups of different race, nationality, religion and so on. This diversity has raised a problematic question "Who is an American?" throughout American history, and the answers to that question have been controversial among American policy makers as well as American Studies scholars.

In this process, each immigrant group has developed their own self-identity as Americans based on their individual racial, national or religious differences as well as an ideology of creating legitimate meanings about "being an American" in the host society. In other words, the characteristics immigrants carry with them when they immigrate to America are transferred into social and cultural meanings within American cultural and ideological contexts. Furthermore, the transitional relationships between their homelands and America serve as significant factors in determining their understanding of their immigrant lives. Through these processes, they transplant their roots and are regenerated into "Americans."

Right after the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attack in 2001, I saw a very interesting TV commercial. In the commercial, several people from diverse racial

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<sup>37</sup> Handlin, Oscar. *The Uprooted*. Boston, MA: Little Brown & Company. 1973.p.1

and ethnic backgrounds appeared one after another and everyone said only one sentence: “We are Americans.” Some even had foreign accents in their English. The commercial was trying to promote the American national identity of people from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds in the time of the most devastating crisis in America. The tone of everyone in the commercial expressed their pride as Americans despite their different racial and ethnic backgrounds.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union which was America’s formidable rival during the Cold War, America became the only superpower in the world in the new millennium. In addition, since the victory of minorities in the Civil Rights movement and the diversification of immigrants as a result of the new immigrant policy, America has praised national diversity according to the ideology of multiculturalism since the late twentieth century. Accordingly, the image as a melting pot prevalent in the early twentieth century has become obsolete and ethnic minority studies began to burgeon in academic institutions. Despite increasing multicultural environments in America, immigrants did not tolerate the process of “uprooting and transplanting” to keep the same status they had in their home country. They came to America to be part of American destiny as citizens of the most powerful country in the current era.

My study of Protestant narratives of Korean Americans demonstrates how Korean Americans redefine what it means to be Americans and use Korean ethnicity to achieve their goals. They are promoting their own pride as Americans through America’s historically inherited concept of God’s chosen people. As long

as America maintains its status as a global superpower and English serves as the international standard language, America will be a country of several versions of God's chosen peoples.



## **CHAPTER 2 BACKGROUND**

The Korean American pre-immigrant perceptions of the United States have predisposed them to make sense of their post-immigrant lives based on a hundred years of relationships between Korea and America. Therefore, it is important to examine a historical background of Korean views of America for understanding how Korean Americans understand their experiences in the United States and project their futures. For this purpose, this chapter will overview the relationships between the two countries from the late nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century.

First of all, I will focus on the roles of American Protestant missionaries who came to Korea in the late nineteenth century. Since their arrival, Korean-American relations have primarily depended on their missionary work because Koreans' contact with Americans was limited to missionaries until the establishment of the pro-American government in South Korea in the middle of the twentieth century. In the history of modern Korea, American missionaries played significant roles in introducing modernity to Korea as well as the development of the Korean Protestant churches. As a result, they contributed to the creation of Koreans' initial images of the United States as a civilized Christian country. Therefore, the examination of the characteristics of the American Protestant missionaries in Korea will illuminate early Korean perceptions of the United States.

In 1945, Korea gained independence from Japan and the national division into the South and the North followed it. South Korea established a pro-American government while North Korea became a communist country under the leadership of the Soviet Union. In South Korea, under the pro-American government, the military alliance between the two countries during and after the Korean War strengthened the influence of United States on South Korean society. This reinforced the idealized images of America as a country leading democratic ideology and supporting the weak. Koreans tended to idealize things about America, which was a phenomenon called “American fever” and this phenomenon gave rise to desires among Koreans to live in America.

Korean immigrants arrived in the United States which they had taken as a model of the most advanced country. Furthermore, the images of an egalitarian society based on the American democratic ideal allowed Korean immigrants to dream of their social mobility regardless of the social barriers and discrimination which blocked their opportunities in Korea. For Korean Americans, the lives and the perceptions they had in Korea have served as yardsticks to interpret the meanings of being Korean Americans. Therefore, this chapter will present the background of their pre-immigrant perceptions and expectations.

## **I. THE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE WEST BEFORE AMERICAN MISSIONAIRES**

### **A. Korean Situation and the National Opening**

Nineteenth century Korea was a time of national decline and totally unprepared for the modern age. The Korean government became corrupt and ineffective so that the nation was weakened financially and militarily. What was worse, in between 1812 and 1813, drought and famine produced a record death toll in Korea; it was said that 4.5 million people died and a million or more perished in cholera epidemics in the summers of 1812 and 1822. As Martha Huntley, one of the foreign missionaries who came to Korea in the late nineteenth century, summed up, in the nineteenth century of Korea:

.....much of the philosophy that had sustained society for long centuries had worn out, and old religions were proving inadequate for new crises. Famine, corruption, peasant uprisings, persecutions and plagues recurred with dismal frequency.<sup>1</sup>

Korea started diplomatic relationships with foreign countries in the era of *Joseon*<sup>2</sup> Dynasty. *Joseon* lasted until 1910 when Japan formally annexed it.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Huntley, Martha. *Caring, Growing, Changing: A History of the Protestant Mission in Korea*. New York: Friendship Press, 1984. p.32.

<sup>2</sup> *Joseon*, meaning "The Land of the Morning Calm," is the name of an empire which was founded in 1452 and lasted until Japan annexed it in 1910. It was also called the Yi dynasty because the family name of the founder of *Joseon* was Yi(Lee), one of the popular last names in Korea.

<sup>3</sup> King Gojong changed the name of the country from *Joseon* to *Daehan Jaeguk* (The Great Empire) in 1897 and used this name until 1910.

Joseon adopted Confucianism as a political ideology and social system of rule and had little access to other countries except China which had been a long-time big brother<sup>4</sup> of Korea in history. Therefore, Korea had been known as a so-called “Hermit Kingdom” until 1876, when Korea finally opened the door to Japan with the conclusion of the Ganghwa Treaty. At the end of nineteenth century, China began to lose its strength due to the invasion of foreign powers. On the other hand, the national modernization movement of the Meiji government in 1869 strengthened Japan. Gaining national strength, Japan intended to expand its control over other countries in Asia.

The Korean government during the reign of Yi Dynasty based on the pre-modern feudal society was forced to accept subordinate positions in relations with foreign countries. In 1863, a twelve-year old boy, known as *Gojong*, became the king of *Joseon*. Due to the young age of *Gojong*, his strong-willed father, Ha-eung Yi, formally known as *Heungseon Daewon-gun*<sup>5</sup> in Korea history, served as his regent until he lost power in 1873. During his control of the nation, *Daewon-gun* maintained strong isolationism in foreign policies as Korea’s reactions to the continuous requests from foreign countries to open the door.

Japan requested to have a modern type of relationship with Korea based on the rules of its new modern government but the Korean government under the

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<sup>4</sup> Based on Confucian hierarchical concept, Joseon gave honor to China as its big brother.

<sup>5</sup> *Daewon-gun* literally translates as "prince of the great court", a title customarily granted to the father of the reigning monarch when that father did not reign himself. While there have been three other Daewon-gun in Joseon Dynasty, Ha-eung Yi had so dominant place in the history of the late Joseon dynasty that the term Daewon-gun usually refers specifically to him.

control of the *Daewon-gun* kept refusing the request from Japan. In reaction, Japanese warships illegally entered Korean territory and Korean garrison forces fired upon them on *Ganghwa* Island off the west coast. Then, Japan dispatched more troops and threatened Korea. The military conflict between these two countries ended with the victory of Japan and the two concluded the *Ganghwa* Treaty in 1876. This treaty determined new diplomatic and commercial relations between Korea and Japan, granting special privileges to Japan and making Korea a subordinate nation to Japan. With this treaty, Korea had to give up isolationism in foreign policies and became involved in international relations in Asia.

## **B. The Relationship with the West**

Due to the isolationism of Korea, there was little contact with the western countries and cultures except the coming of a few Catholic missionaries. However, Korean government repressed Catholicism and anti-western attitudes toward western religions and cultures pervaded among the Korean public. Despite these unfavorable situations to the westerners before the arrival of American Protestant missionaries in the late nineteenth century, American missionaries achieved remarkable success in their missionary work in Korea and had strong influences on Korean society. The following will examine the success of American Protestant missionaries despite the anti-western conditions in Korea and their influences on Korean society.

## 1. Contact with Roman Catholicism

The first contact of Korea with the West was through Catholicism. The first encounter with Catholicism is reported to have been through the Japanese.

Catholicism had rapidly grown in Japan since St. Jesuit missionary Francis Xavier, a Jesuit introduced Catholicism to Japan in 1549.<sup>6</sup> When Japan invaded Korea in 1592, a Roman Catholic general, Konish Yukinaga asked Jesuit missionary Fr. Gregorio de Cespedes to minister to Japanese soldiers in Korea. Therefore, Japanese Catholic soldiers and a missionary became the first Catholic believers who landed in Korea. However, their influences on Korea were hardly found. After the war, even though more than two thousand Korean captives in Japan were presumed to have converted to Catholicism, there was little evidence of the existence of Korean Catholic converts in Japan.<sup>7</sup>

The full-blown introduction of Catholicism to Korea was through the Korean scholars who visited China in the eighteenth century. Chinese Catholicism began with the efforts of an Italian Jesuit missionary, Matteo Ricci, in Beijing in 1601. Korean visitors became interested in this new faith and western knowledge. At first, Korean scholars regarded Catholicism as one branch of new philosophical

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<sup>6</sup> Hanguk Gidokgyo ui Yeoksa Ywonguso (The Institute of Korean Church History Studies). *Hanguk Gidokgyo ui Yeoksasa I. (A History of Korean Church)*. Seoul: Gidok Gyonmunsa (The Christian Literature Press), 1989. p.45-48

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p.57-61; Kang, Wi Jo. *Christ and Caesar in Modern Korea: A History of Christianity and Politics*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press. 1997. p.1

learning, calling it *Seohak* meaning Western Learning. However, gradually Koreans accepted it as a religion and the number of the converted increased.

As the number of Catholic believers grew in Korea, *Joseon*'s ruling class under rigid Confucianism strictly restricted the entrance of western missionaries and contacts, calling Catholicism an "evil religion" because it prohibited the practice of ancestor worship. In *Joseon*, the refusal of ancestor worship meant the betrayal of the ruling orders and philosophy of the nation. The severe persecution of Catholics took place several times in 1791, 1815, 1819, 1827, 1839 and 1866. In these persecutions, the *Joseon* ruling class executed some Western priests from European countries and a lot of Korean Catholic believers.<sup>8</sup>

## **2. The Attempt and Failures of Protestant Missionaries before 1882**

Not until 1882 were Protestant missionaries permitted to enter Korea.<sup>9</sup> Before then, there were two attempts of Protestant missionaries to visit Korea. The Netherlands Missionary Society dispatched the first missionary, German Reverend Karl Gutzlaff. Interested in Asian missions, Gutzlaff came to Korea in 1832 as an interpreter on the British ship *Lord Amherst* which aimed to open trade with Asian

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<sup>8</sup> *Daewon-gun* executed the harshest persecution between 1866 and 1873. In those persecutions, seven French priests were beheaded and about from 8,000 to 20,000 Korean believers were killed. Kang, Wi Jo. *Ibid.*, p.1-8; Hanguk Gidokgyo ui Yeoksa Ywonguso (The Institute of Korean Church History Studies). 1989. *Ibid.*, p.87-121; Lee, Man Yeol. *Hanguk Gikokgyo Suyongsa Yeongu*. (Introduction of Christianity to Korea) Seoul: Doora Sidae, 1998. p.28-38;

<sup>9</sup> In 1882, Korea concluded official diplomatic treaty with America which permitted the entrance of Protestant missionaries. I will discuss this more later.

countries. *Lord Amherst* arrived at an island near *Hwanghae* Province and in Basil's Bay in *Chung Cheong* Province located in central Korea. The British sent a petition letter with the gifts to the royal court in Seoul, in the hope of establishing a commercial trade agreement but there were no responses. In the meantime, Gutzlaff had the chance to contact some local people and distributed the Chinese Scriptures and tracts to them.<sup>10</sup> Even though he was not permitted to enter Korea, this distribution of the Christian literature was the main contribution of Gutzlaff's visit.<sup>11</sup>

The other was the Scottish missionary from China, Reverend Robert Jermain Thomas. While he was staying in China, Thomas had chance to meet two Roman Catholic Koreans at the home of the Reverend Alexander Williams of the National Bible Society of Scotland. Impressed by the faith of the Korean believers and encouraged by Williams, Thomas came to Korea for the first time on September in 1865 and spent two and one half months in *Hwanghae* Province. During his stay, Thomas distributed the Chinese Scriptures and learned Korean. Then he came back to Korea the next year as a translator on the American schooner *General Sherman* which attempted to open trade with Korea. *The General Sherman* entered the *Daedong* river near *Pyeongyang*, the current capital city of North

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<sup>10</sup> Hanguk Gidokgyo Yeoksa Yeonguso (The Institute of Korean Church History Studies). 1989. *Ibid.*, p.129-134; Kang, Wi Jo. *Ibid.*, p.9-10

<sup>11</sup> Gutzlaff left Korea saying, "In the great plan of the eternal God, there will be a time of merciful visitation for them. While we look for this, we sought to be very anxious to hasten its approach by diffusing the glorious doctrine of the cross by all means in our power... the Scripture teaches us to believe that God can bless even these feeble beginnings. Let us hope that better days will soon dawn for Korea." Kang, Wi Jo. *Ibid.*, p.10



Korea, but Korean troops attacked and burned the ship, mistaking them for invaders. Thomas was killed at the age of twenty seven when the *General Sherman* was burned.<sup>12</sup> According to a Korean's testimony, Thomas distributed the Chinese Scriptures to Koreans to the last moment when he died.<sup>13</sup> Thomas became the first Protestant martyr in Korea. Thus, the entrance of western Protestant missionaries had failed before the official relationship between Korea and the United States started in 1882.

### 3. The Opening to America

Western countries including the United States attempted to open relationships with Korea, but they failed due to the anti-western isolationism of *Daewon-gun* who had strong hostility toward the westerners, calling them

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<sup>12</sup> For vivid description of the *General Sherman* Incident, see *Ibid.* p.11. "Preston, the owner of the ship and his Chinese interpreter went ashore and met the governor of *Pyeongyang* and the commander of the garrison. The commander and three of his men went out to visit the ship. The ship's crew asked to see his insignia of office, which had been given to him by the King, and refused to give it back. Then the four men were forced into the ship's long boat and taken up the river. The Koreans on shore offered a large reward to any one who would rescue their comrades. A man by the name of Pak Choon Kwun rowed out in a scull to the "long boat" which was having difficulty getting up the rapids... The Koreans attempted to jump into the scull. The general and one of his men were saved but the other two were drowned... firing from the ship continued off and on for two weeks, during which time twenty Koreans were killed and a large number wounded. Meanwhile the ship was hopelessly grounded in the mire and the crew began to sue for peace. They sent a man and an interpreter to make apologies to the governor. The men were bound and ordered to send for the rest of the crew if apologies were really meant But this order was suspected to be a ruse and as soon as a note on paper was sent back, firing from the ship was resumed. The Korean ship a large scow loaded with pine branches of fire, on September 3, 1866. The crew in attempting to escape, jumped into the water and were killed as they came ashore."

<sup>13</sup> Hanguk Gidokgyo Yeoksa Yeonguso (The Institute of Korean Church History Studies). 1989. *Op. Cit.*, p.10-11

“barbarians”<sup>14</sup> and whose supporters objected to receiving any of their “evil ideas and ways.”<sup>15</sup>

After the failing of the first attempt by sending the *Gerneral Sherman* in 1866, the United States sought the assistance from China and Japan for the opening of the diplomatic relations with Korea. China accepted the offer under the condition that the United States should recognize China’s sovereignty over Korea against Japan. A Chinese diplomat in Japan, Tsun-hsien Huang wrote a booklet entitled *Korean Strategy* (or *A Policy for Korea*) which gave King *Gojong* positive impressions about the United States. According to the analysis of Korean historian Yur-Bok Lee, Huang encouraged Korea to negotiate with the United States because the United States was “a powerful industrial and anti-imperialist power,” and was “a moral state, founded upon Christianity, which usually supports weaker nations against strong oppressors.”<sup>16</sup> In addition, Huang argued that Korea should keep away from Russia, maintain close ties with China and use Japan as the way to access western culture.<sup>17</sup> In the meantime, Korea gave up its isolationism in foreign relations after *Daewon-gun* resigned in 1873 and established a trade treaty

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<sup>14</sup> Daewon-gun refused to accept any foreign influences saying, “The barbarians from beyond the seas have violated our borders and invaded our land. If we do not fight we must make a treaty with them. Those who favor making a treaty sell their country. Let this be a warning to ten thousand generations.”  
Moffet, Samuel Hugh. *The Christians of Korea*. Friendship Press. 1962. p.156.

<sup>15</sup> Nahm, Andrew C., *Introduction to Korean History and Culture* Seoul, Korea: Hollym, 1993. p.146.

<sup>16</sup> Yur-bok Lee & Wayne Patterson, ed., *Korean-American Relations, 1866-1997*. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1999. p.12

<sup>17</sup> Nahm, Andrew. *Op. Cit.*, p.143-151

with Japan in 1876. Therefore, in addition to the advice from China, the changes in Korean foreign policies let the Korean government finally open the door to the United States in 1882.

The treaty between Korea and the United States was signed on May 23, 1882 at *Chemulpo*, the present *Incheon*, a port city near Seoul. This treaty is often called the *Chemulpo* Treaty named after the name of the port city or also the Shufeldt Treaty named after the American representative at the time of the conclusion of the treaty, Commodore Robert W. Shufeldt. With this treaty, the United States became the first western country to establish an official diplomatic relation with Korea, and this treaty served as a model for following treaties with other western countries.<sup>18</sup> This treaty established mutual friendship, defense in case of attack and approved Korean immigration to America. However, unfortunately for Koreans, it was an “unequal treaty” which granted America the most favored status in trade and provided legal immunity to American citizens in Korea. In addition, this treaty promised non-interference of Christian missionaries proselytizing in Korea, which allowed American Protestant missionaries to come to Korea.

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<sup>18</sup> After the official diplomatic treaty between the United States, Korea concluded very similar treaties with England and Russia in 1883 and with Italy in 1884, France in 1886. *Ibid.*, p.150

### C. Anti-western Attitudes in the Nineteenth Century Korea

Throughout the nineteenth century, anti-western attitudes prevailed in Korea. The basis of strong Korean anti-western attitudes was on their views dominated by their Sinocentric worldviews. Influenced by China, Korean *yangban*, the powerful aristocratic class, had regarded China as the only civilized world and the Western countries including America as barbaric nations because they were outside the Sinic zone.<sup>19</sup> The following opinion of the minister of education Ki-Son Shin illustrates this anti-western views among the ruling class in Joseon.

Europe and America are far removed from the center of civilization. It would not be too far from the truth to think of Europeans and Americans as more like animals than human beings. Their languages resemble the chirping of birds rather than human languages, so that one finds hard to understand them. Their religion, called Christianity, is a paganism so full of vulgarities, fallacies and superstitions that it is not worth our attention.<sup>20</sup>

Aggressive and suspicious activity of Western powers also aggravated Korean anti-western sentiments. Before 1876, Western warships frequently appeared on the Korean shores and demanded the opening of trade and sometimes protested the persecution of Catholic priests by the Korean government. Witnessing the invasion of China by Western powers such as England and France, the Korean government felt very threatened by the Western powers. Since the Koreans thought

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<sup>19</sup> The western countries were located in the west of China, Koreans called westerners *yangho* meaning “Western barbarians.”

<sup>20</sup> Huntley, Martha. *Op., Cit.*, p12.

that Western powers were based on Christianity, Catholicism in particular, anti-Western attitudes also meant anti-Christianity.

Besides the emergence of western warships and their threats, there were two incidents which strengthened Korea's xenophobia caused by Daewon-gun's anti-Western isolationism and the harsh suppression of Catholicism. The first one was the so-called *Hwang Sayeong* Incident in 1801 and the other, the Ernest Oppert Incident in 1868.

Sayeong Hwang was a Korean Catholic convert. Witnessing the large scale of persecution of Catholics in 1801, Hwang attempted to send a letter to the French bishop in Peking. The letter included the exposure of the merciless persecution of Korean Catholics and Western Catholic priests by Korean Confucian ruling elites. In addition, the letter petitioned the intervention of foreign powers, even militarily, for the protection of the religious freedom of Catholicism in Korea.<sup>21</sup> However, Korean officers caught him and the contents of this letter enraged the Korean government and exacerbated the repression of Catholicism.

Another incident occurred in June of 1868 when German merchant Ernest Oppert was caught attempting to desecrate and steal the tomb of Daewon-gun's father in *Chungcheong* Province. Oppert intended to take the precious treasure of royal families as security for opening trade and as a guarantee of religious freedom

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<sup>21</sup> Hanguk Gidokgyo ui Yeoksa Ywonguso (The Institute of Korean Church History Studies). 1989. *Op. Cit.*, p.90-92; Park, Chung-Shin. *Protestantism and Politics in Korea*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press. 2003. p.19.

in Korea.<sup>22</sup> This aggressive incident aggravated the hatred toward Western countries and strengthened *Cheoksaron* (a scholarly argument against western leanings) among Confucian elites.

Anti-western sentiments pervaded not only among Confucian elites but also among the populace who followed *Donghak*<sup>23</sup> meaning Easterning Learning. The following poem by Je-U Choi, a founder of *Donghak* shows well the anti-western feelings among the populace.

In the beginning of the year of Gyeongsin (1860) we received word that  
The fickle Western thieves had invaded China  
And raised up the church of the LORD of Heaven, spreading that false  
teaching  
All around the world. Doesn't it make one laugh and stop singing.<sup>24</sup>

Choi expressed his anti-western attitudes, calling the western countries “thieves” and Christianity “false teaching.” Another example is the following poem composed by the *Pansori*<sup>25</sup> master Chae-Hyo Shin in 1866.

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<sup>22</sup> Hanguk Gidokgyo ui Yeoksa Ywonguso (The Institute of Korean Church History Studies). 1989. *Ibid.*, p.118; Park, Chung-Shin. *Ibid.*, p.19.

<sup>23</sup> The *Donghak* was founded in 1860 by Korean gentle, Je-U Choi (1824-1964). Choi tried to revive Oriental learning such as Confucianism, Buddhism, Shamanism, and Taoism and combined them based on Korean traditions. Choi founded Donghak as an alternative to Western learning which was growing in the nineteenth century and had strong animosity to the West. Influenced by Donghak, peasant rebellions broke out and they provided the pretext of the entrance of outside forces such as Japan, China and Russia.

<sup>24</sup> Quoted in Lew, Young Ick, “A Historical Overview of Korean Perceptions of the United States: Five Major Stereotypes.” Trans. By Michael Finch. *Korean Journal*. Vol 44, No. 1. Spring, 2004. Seoul: Korea National Commission for UNESCO:109-151, p.116

<sup>25</sup> *Pansori* is a genre of Korean music. It is a vocal and percussional music performed by one *sorikkun* (a singer) and one *gosu* (a drummer). The term *pansori* is derived from *pan*, meaning "a place where many people gather," and *sori*, meaning "sound."

Disgraceful Western scoundrels, you should be spreading  
 The teachings of the Lord of Heaven, which recognizes neither king nor  
 father,  
 In your own country. Our Eastern country of *Dangun* and *Gija*<sup>26</sup>  
 Upholds filial piety and loyalty. How dare you raise troops and cross the sea?  
 We have set fire to your floating fortresses and shot you dead  
 At Mt. *Cheongjok* Fortress. Quickly, quickly  
 Run away while you are still alive.<sup>27</sup>

At times, the anti-Western Koreans performed violent actions, raising social unrest. The disturbance called the Baby Riot of 1888 was one of the incidents caused by anti-western attitudes of Koreans. The cause of this riot was a rumor that western missionaries and their hospitals kidnapped Korean children and sold them to foreign merchants.<sup>28</sup> The agitated Korean mobs by this rumor raised the protest on June 10, 1888 and it lasted for fifteen days.<sup>29</sup> In the end, American, French and Russian Marines suppressed this riot and established their military stations for the purpose of guarding their legations.

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<sup>26</sup> Dangun is a legendary founder of Gojoseon, the first kingdom of Korea. Gija is a Chinese legendary sage. Both are representing Eastern heroes.

<sup>27</sup> Cho, Dong-il, "Kaehawgi ui aeguk kasa"(Patriotic songs of the Enlightenment period) in Min Pyeongsu, Kaehwagi ui Aeguk Munhak(Patriotic Literature of the Enlightenment Period) Seoul: Singu Munhwasa, 1979. p.82. quoted in Song, Byong-kie "The Perception of the United States during the Period of National Seclusion." Lew, Young Ick & Byong-Kie Song & Ho-Min Yang & Hy-sop Lim. Trans. By Michael Finch. *Korean Perceptions of the United States: A History of Their Origins and Formation*. Seoul: Jimoondang, 2006:53-104, p.74

<sup>28</sup> "It was rumored that the Western barbarians were kidnapping and eating children, and using their eyes in cameras. Koreans, who did not milk cows, generally believed that to get the condensed milk they used, foreigners caught Korean women and cut off their breasts. The hospital was suspected of butchering children, and the orphanage fattening them up for immoral purposes." Huntley, Martha. *Op. Cit.*, p.52.

<sup>29</sup> Lee, Man Yeol. *Op. Cit.*,p.186.

In addition, a group of people who were assumed to be former members of *Donghak* posted placards reviling the missionaries on the house of George H. Jones, one of the American missionaries. The posters were mainly criticizing the missionaries for their ethical wrongdoings and exposed the perceived immorality of Christianity.<sup>30</sup> Due to these anti-western sentiments illustrated above, American missionaries in Korea felt so afraid of being attacked by Korean mobs that they carried pistols for their security.<sup>31</sup>

## II. THE SUCCESS OF AMERICAN PROTESTANT MISSIONARIES

After the conclusion of the official relationships between the United States and Korea, American Protestant missionaries entered Korea in earnest for their evangelical activities and achieved great success in their missions despite the unfavorable attitudes toward the Westerners at that time. In the process of spreading Protestantism, they played leading roles in establishing Korean perceptions of the United States and Christianity as well. I will discuss three causes contributing to the success of American Protestant missionaries.

First of all, the establishment of friendly relationships between American missionaries and the Korean royal family members laid the foundation of Protestant

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Ryu, Dae Young, *Chogi Miguk Seungyosa Yeongu, 1884–1910: Seungyosadeurui Jungsancheungjeok Seunggyeogeul Jungsimeuro (Early American Missionaries in Korea: Understanding Missionaries from their Middle-Class Background.* Seoul, South Korea: Hanguk Gidokgyo Yeoksa Yeonguso (The Christian Literature Press). 2001. p.67; Underwood, Lillias H. *With Tommy Tompkins in Korea.* New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1905. p193.



missions of American missionaries and their personal intimacy gave American missionaries privileges to perform their missionary works in Korea. Another cause of the success of Protestant missions in Korea was the dismal social condition in Korea due to continuous wars, political unrest and economic difficulties by epidemics and famine. Under these hardships, the new religious ideas appealed to people who were seeking new social values and orders. In addition, Japan's colonization of Korea and increasing Korean anti-Japanese sentiments contributed to the generation of pro-American attitudes among Koreans who believed America to be a country which would protect and help them.

#### **A. Friendly Relationships of American Missionaries with Korean Royal Family**

Horace Allen was the first Protestant missionary to settle in Korea. Allen volunteered for Korean missions while he was working as a Presbyterian missionary in China. With the permission of the board of missions, Allen arrived in Seoul in September of 1884. He was introduced to King Gojong as a physician, not a missionary, because the Korean government hardly welcomed Christian missionaries. The U.S. Minister General Lucius H. Foote welcomed Allen because the American Legation as well as the foreign communities lacked a physician. Foote appointed him as physician to the Legation, and Allen gained a secure position in Korea due to his medical profession.

In the meanwhile, he had the good fortune of gaining favor with the Korean government. In the same year of Allen's arrival, the progressive party staged a bloody palace coup against the conservative government under the leadership of Queen Min, a wife of King Gojong and her relatives. However, only three days after the coup, the conservative party regained the power with support from China.<sup>32</sup> In this political upheaval, King Gojong's nephew Prince Yeong-Ik Min was badly injured and Allen treated him. Through his healing of a member of the royal family, Allen formed a friendly relationship with the Korean royal family members despite the anti-Christianity attitudes of the Korean government.

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<sup>32</sup> After the national opening to foreign countries, there were progressive movements by pro-Japanese reformers, against the conservative pro-Chinese governments. The Kanhwa treaty with Japan caused the rise of a progressive party which emphasized modernization of Korea as the only way to strengthen the nation. Young scholars such as Kim Ok-Kyun and Park Young Hyo, had opportunity to visit Japan in 1880 as envoys after the Kanhwa treaty. During their visits to Japan, they were very impressed by Japanese modernization with the influence of western cultures and argued that the Korean government should accept the advanced western cultures for the improvement of the nation. In the 1880s, as the Japanese influence rapidly increased, the progressive party began to campaign for political and social reforms, following the model of Japan. In addition, this progressive party stood against the conservative groups who insisted in maintaining the status quo and the unilateral relationship with China under the control of the government with Queen Min and Prince Min Young Ik. Against these conservatives, the progressive party plotted to overthrow the conservative government with the help of Japanese troops and carried out a coup (*Gapsin Jeongbyeon* in Korean) in 1884. However, that progressive coup failed after 2 days due to the intervention of Chinese troops which came to Korea at the request of the Korean government. In addition, their alliances with Japan failed to gain the support from the public because Japan was Korea's traditional enemy. After the fall of the Progressives, the pro-Chinese government stayed in power until China lost the war against Japan in 1894. After the victory of the Sino-Japanese war, the Japanese imperialist ambitions increased in Asia including Korea. Then, the Queen Min became pro-Russian for preventing the Japanese dominance. This dependence on Russia increased when the King Gojong and his crown prince moved to the Russian legation for protection and stayed there until 1897 after the Japanese troops assassinated Queen Min on the night of October 8, 1895 while she was sleeping and the Japanese troops surrounded the palace. However, the victory of Japan in the Russo-Japanese war (1904) enabled Japan to finalize the Japanese imperialistic plan for Korea.

Furthermore, Allen got permission to open a royal hospital under mission auspices, which is known as the first modern hospital in Korea.<sup>33</sup> As a medical missionary, Allen performed very significant functions in introducing Christianity to Korea, changing the image of Americans as “barbarians” into a positive image as advanced culture and morality. Samuel Hugh Moffett, one of the influential American missionaries in Korea, described the establishment of this hospital:

The coming of the Christian hospital was like a fresh wind blowing away ancient superstitions and musty practices, relieving fear and suffering in amazing ways, and bringing the best of healing even to the poorest of the poor<sup>34</sup>

This hospital became the foothold of American Protestant missionaries and Allen’s privileged position in the Korean government contributed to the subsequent success of Protestant Christianity.

Not only Allen but also other American missionaries such as Horace G. Underwood, Henry. G. Appenzeller, and Lillias Horton who became Mrs. Underwood later, also maintained a close relationship with Korean royal family. The following illustrates the personal intimacy between Queen Min and Lillias Horton:

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<sup>33</sup>This hospital was named *Jejungwon*, meaning “the House of the Helpfulness.” It was the first modern medical hospital which combined hospital and education. It developed into the current Severance Hospital which belongs to Yonsei University, one of Korea’s prestigious universities.

<sup>34</sup> Moffet, Samuel Hugh. *Op. Cit.*, p.158.

When she(Lillis Horton, Mrs. Underwood) did meet Queen Min in the autumn of 1888, each woman immediately liked the other. They had much in common, petite and stout-hearted, fragile-looking yet determined; both were intelligent and conservative, and both would be doting mothers. When Lillie and Horace Underwood were married on March 13, 1889, the Queen showed her regard by sending as a wedding gift a whole train of little pack ponies laden with one million Korean coins called cash.<sup>35</sup>

In addition, when the Japanese assassinated Queen Min in 1895, King Gojong asked the missionaries to take turns being on guard near his room.<sup>36</sup> In particular, the King, seeking comfort, summoned Horace Underwood to the palace and slept with his head upon Underwood's shoulder. After this incident, the King openly said that Underwood was his brother and that he could never forget what Underwood had done for him in time of trouble.<sup>37</sup> Thanks to the close relationship between American missionaries and the Korean royal family members, American missionaries obtained many privileges including their extraterritorial rights and the permission to travel within Korea.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Huntley, Martha. *Op. Cit.*, p.51

<sup>36</sup> Lee, Man Yeol. *Op. Cit.*, p.185; Underwood, Lillias H. *Underwood of Korea*. Fleming H. Revell Co., 1918. p.148.

<sup>37</sup> Underwood, Lillias H. *Ibid.*, p.177

<sup>38</sup> Lee, Man Yeol. *Op., Cit.*,p.188

## **B. Korean National Hardships**

Korean situations grew worse during the last decade of the nineteenth century. The people suffered the corruption of the officers, epidemic diseases and the fear of foreign powers. These hard times enabled Protestant churches to appeal to the panic-stricken people who were weary of the continuous social unrest and wars. In 1894, the Sino-Japanese war broke out and ended with the victory of Japan. The defeat of China shocked Koreans who had adhered to centuries' long Sinocentric worldviews. The growing power of Japan threatened Korea. In particular, the bodies of the injured and the dead polluted the living conditions of *Pyeongyang* which was an actual battleground. What was worse, an epidemic of cholera made many suffer from typhus-fever and dysentery.

During these continuous national hardships, the devotion of the American missionaries to the treatment of the sick and the poor soothed the mood of anti-Christianity in Korea. The missionaries worked day and night at the risk of their own lives and saved thousands of lives. The following is the comment of a rickshaw man on Dr. Underwood who was going out to treat the sick at dawn:

One morning, as Dr. Underwood was hurrying to the hospital before dawn, a coolie at the roadside was heard to ask a group of others: "Who is this foreigner rushing through the streets at such an hour and in such haste?" "Why, that is the Jesus man who works day and night caring for the sick because he loves us so," was the reply.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Underwood, Lillias H. *Op. Cit.*, p.144-145

As described in the episode above, American missionaries devoted themselves to Koreans in their hard times and Korean people used this new religion to overcome their painful realities. Among people, there was a saying “there was no need for them to die when they might have gone to the Christian hospital and live.” Therefore, for missionaries, these hard times became a way for them to give positive impressions and to lessen the suspicions and hostilities of Koreans toward the westerners. As a result, Protestant churches achieved surprisingly rapid growth. <Table 1> shows the rapid increase of new converts in the Methodist and Presbyterian churches from 1893 to 1906. In particular, between 1894 and 1896, during the period of the Sino-Japanese war, the number grew by more than ten times.

### **C. Anti-Japanese Nationalism and Christianity**

Unlike other Asian countries, Christian western countries did not colonize Korea. This fact lifted Korean suspicion of imperial ambition of America. On the contrary, Koreans believed that America would help them with modernization and national independence. This belief increased as Koreans witnessed that China and Russia, which they had depended on for their protection, were defeated in the wars against Japan in 1894 and 1905, respectively. Furthermore, as Japan revealed its imperial ambition over Korea, even the former pro-Japanese progressive elites turned to America as an alternate route to social enlightenment and modernization.

The Independence Club was an example of the association of progressive elites and Christianity. The two leading figures in starting The Independence Club such as Jae-pil Seo(Philip Jaison) and Chi-Ho Yun, led the 1884 political upheaval against the Confucian pro-Chinese government with the support of Japan. After the failure of the coup, they fled Korea to America. While they were staying in America, they received an American education and became Christians. After ten years, they came back to Korea and founded the Independence Club in 1896 for the purpose of enlightening and modernizing Korea. The Independence Club lasted until December 1898. Based on their experiences in America, they advocated American republican political ideas. Furthermore, most members of this Club were Christians and were closely associated with the American missionaries in Korea. Even though the motivations behind their Christian conversions were not purely religious, the change of their attitudes from pro-Japanese to pro-American contributed to the growth of Protestant churches under the dominant influences of American missionaries.

< Table 1 > The Number of New Converts from 1893 to 1906

Church Year	Methodist Church						Presbyterian Church	
	North Methodist Church			South Methodist Church			Baptism	Total
	Baptism	Catechism	Total	Baptism	Catechism	Total		
1888	11	27	38				-	-
1889	9	36	45				-	-
1890	-	-	-				-	-
1891	15	58	73				15	-
1892	-	-	159				-	-
1893	68	173	241				-	-
1894	68	167	335				40	-
1895	122	288	410				180	-
1896	223	588	817				2,000	-
1897	305	1,074	1,379	48	108	156	2,344	6,800
1898	556	1,502	2,058	-	-	-	2,800	7,500
1899	649	1,967	2,616	-	-	-	3,426	9,364
1900	792	3,105	3,897	-	-	-	4,000	13,569
1901	948	3,820	4,768	492	157	649	7,481	14,784
1902	1,296	4,559	5,855	454	377	831	6,167	19,327
1903	1,616	5,299	6,915	492	472	964	6,484	24,971
1904	2,006	4,979	6,985	611	392	1,003	6,946	26,554
1905	2,457	5,339	7,796	751	457	1,208	8,431	37,407
1906	2,810	9,981	12,791	1,217	1,117	2,334	12,161	56,943

Source: Hanguk Gidokgyo ui Yeoksa Ywonguso (The Institute of Korean Church History Studies). *Hanguk Gidokgyo ui Yeoksasa I. (A History of Korean Church)*. Seoul: Gidok Gyonmunsa (The Christian Literature Press), 1989. p.254.

In addition, the nationalistic characteristic of Christianity contributed to the success of Protestant churches in Korea during the colonization period. Even though American missionaries were politically neutral and hardly involved in the independence movements in Korea,<sup>40</sup> Christianity ironically influenced the

<sup>40</sup> The central board of missions from America guided the missionaries to stay away from the politics in Korea. According to an article in *Foreign Missionary*, the board of missions in the United States warned the missionaries in Korea of their involvement in Korean political affairs, saying



development of nationalism among Korean Christians. Korean Christians used churches as the places for their communication networks and resistance organizations. For Koreans, being Christians was closely related with being patriotic and Korean Christians expressed their patriotism by raising a national flag every Sunday at the churches and their homes.<sup>41</sup> In addition, Korean Christians frequently gathered for prayer meetings for the country.

The active participation of Protestant churches in the March First Independence Movement against Japan in 1919, illustrates the strong nationalism of Korean Protestant churches during the Japanese occupation. Inspired by Woodrow Wilson's proclamation of the national self-determination doctrine at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, Korean nationalist leaders including Christian leaders planned this movement. On March 1, 1919, approximately 2,000,000 Koreans participated in and 7,000 had been killed by Japanese police and soldiers. March First

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"nothing could be more uncalled for, or more injurious to our real missionary work, than for us to seem to take any part in the political factions of Korea." ("The Hour for Korea," *Foreign Missionary*, 44,4 (September, 1885), p.156. quoted in Kang, Wi Jo. *Op.Cit.*, p.17 ) American missionaries respected the relations between the United States and the Japanese government. Since the United States recognized the control of Japan over Korea, the involvement of the American government in Korean issues was limited to the protection of American citizens and human rights issues caused by the Japanese afflictions on the Korean people. Some missionaries were even pro-Japanese. According to the testimony of William Scranton, a Methodist medical missionary, the missionaries sometimes tended to be pro-Japanese even though they claimed to be neutral. Scranton said in the letter to the Methodist mission board, "As foreigner living in Korea, we are nearly all pro-Japanese to the extent of wishing well for Japan in Korea, if she will do well by Korea, we are Korea sympathizers first and look at Korea from the local standpoint." (Huntley, Martha. *Op. Cit.*, p.155) The religiously conservative and evangelical characteristics of American missionaries justified their apolitical attitudes toward Japanese colonization. Whenever the missionaries were asked about their thoughts about the Japanese in Korea, their answers were limited to the literal application the Bible to the reality, saying "loyal recognition was the duty of every Christian and in line with the teaching of Christ, who said 'Render unto Caesar the things which be Caesar,' and of Paul, who said 'Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers.'" (Brown, Arthur J. *The Mastery of the Far East*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1919. p.566)

Independence Movement was one of the largest independence movements in Korea which was a peace movement and spread to the whole nation. Korean Protestant leaders were the main figures in this movement. 15 out of 33 people who signed the Korean Declaration of Independence during the movement were Christians.

This close association of the national independence movement and patriotic activities with Protestant churches, encouraged Koreans to be converted to Christianity as a way to participate in nationalistic activities centered on the churches.

### **III. AMERICAN MISSIONAIRES AS TRASMITTERS OF AMERICAN IDEAS AND VALUES**

With the development of Protestant churches, the influences of American missionaries on Korean society increased. Since Koreans' contact with Americas was limited to American missionaries, they played significant roles as transmitters of American values and ideas and contributed to the formation of Korean initial images of America. Therefore, I will examine what kinds of people American missionaries were as a way to comprehend the constitutions of Korean perspectives of America.

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<sup>41</sup> Kim, In Soo. *Ganchurin Hanguk-gyoheo ui Yeoksa. (The Brief History of Korean Churches)* Seoul: Hanguk Jangnogyo Chulpansa, 1998. p.126

## A. The Characteristics of American Missionaries

To start, they took a staunchly conservative approach to theology and biblical criticism. They adhered to the millenarianism concerning Christ's Second Coming, and even had the puritanical attitude which regarded liberal theology as heretical. In addition, they were strongly colored by Pietism regardless of denomination. Therefore, they attached great importance to the experience of rebirth, which they insisted could be attained through approaching God on an individual level, and Scriptural study and prayer. They also emphasized the ethical practice of connecting proselytizing with succoring the needy. Early missionaries recognized the Bible's absolute authority and maintained a strongly gospel-centered character in search of principles of the Protestant faith.<sup>42</sup>

As Korean scholar of religion Hyeon Beom Jo sums up, the theological characteristics of the American missionaries were conservative based on Puritanism and pietism.

The American mainline Protestant churches, particularly the Northern and Southern Methodist Churches and the North and South Presbyterian Churches, sent a majority of American Protestant missionaries to Korea and influenced the characteristics of missionaries in Korea such as their theological viewpoints, missionary policies and attitude about the Korean society.<sup>43</sup> Influenced by the

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<sup>42</sup> Cho, Hyeon Beom., "A Study on the Protestant Discourse of Civilization in Early Modern Korea." *Korea Journal*, 41:1. (Spring 2001):18-43.p.21.

<sup>43</sup> < Table 2> The Total Numbers of Foreign Missionaries in Korea between 1884-1910

	NP	NM	SP	SM	AP	CP	CE	Others
Number	165	114	62	46	27	15	16	54
%	33.1	22.9	12.4	9.2	5.4	3.0	3.2	10.8

evangelical Protestant churches in the nineteenth century America, their theological characteristics were conservative and evangelical. They believed in the absolute authority of the Bible and the individual salvation through the faith in Christ. They also emphasized experiencing the grace of God and rebirth through conversion and maintained that the true Christians should dedicate their lives to evangelizing the world through missionary works and the purification of their lives.

These conservative missionaries were also characterized by strict Puritanism. Arthur J. Brown, a secretary of Board of Foreign Missions of the American Presbyterian Church, described the Puritan features of American missionaries:

The typical missionary of the first quarter century after the opening of the country was a man of the Puritan type. They kept the Sabbath as our New England forefathers did a century ago. He looked upon dancing, smoking, and card-playing as sins in which no true follower of Christa should indulge. In theology and biblical criticism he was strongly conservative, and he held as a vital truth the premillenarian view of the second coming of Christ. The higher criticism and liberal theology were deemed dangerous heresies. In most of the evangelical churches of American and Great Britain, conservatives and evangelical liberals have learned to live together in peace but in Korea the evangelical liberal, whose interpretation of the Bible differs from the commonly accepted one, sometimes has a rough road to travel.<sup>44</sup>

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NP: Presbyterian Church (U.S.A)=North Presbyterian ; NM: Methodist Episcopal Church (Northern Methodist); SP:Presbyteiran Church (U.S.)=South Presbyterian; SM: Methodist Episcopal Church, South; AP: Australian Presbyterian Church; CP: Canadian Presbyterian Church; CE: Church of England=Anglican Church; Others: Salvation Army, Oriental Missionary Society, Seventh Day Adventists and etc.

Ryu, Dae Young, *Op.Cit.*, p.27

Original source: Rhodes, Harry ed. *History of the Korea Mission Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. Vol. I. 1884-1934*. Seoul: Joseon Mission, Presbyterian Church, U.S.A., 1934. p.625-632.

<sup>44</sup> Brown, Arthur J. *Op.Cit.*, p.540.

In addition, evangelical revival movements such as The Student Volunteer Movement(SVM) influenced American missionaries in Korea.<sup>45</sup> American seminarians of the major theology schools including Princeton and Drew, inaugurated the Inter-Seminary Alliance in 1886. The annual conferences of SVM appealed to the emotions and passions of young believers, igniting their foreign missionary zeal. As a result, half of the foreign missionaries during the late nineteenth century vowed their dedications to foreign missions during the SVM meetings.<sup>46</sup> For instance, in the summer of 1886, in the beginning of the conference at Mount Hermon, Massachusetts, only 21 students of 251 participants were reported to have the intention to become foreign missionaries. But at the end of the 26-days' conference, the number of those who volunteered for foreign missionaries increased to over 100.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> The American missionaries at that time were influenced by the Second Great Awakening which swept America in the nineteenth century. That was a religious revival movement spreading in the 1820s and 1830s and gave strong impact on American Protestantism and societies. Charles Grandison Finney, a leading figure of this movement, achieved great success in New York and Rochester. There, many people gathered in prayer meetings every night, confessed their sins and were converted. This movement emphasized the individual salvation through God's grace and admonished the repentance of their sins. This movement created the new approaches and techniques of evangelists which appeal people's emotional feelings and inspire evangelical zeal. It influenced the creation of communitywide campaigns, testimony meetings of the converted, Sunday school movements, evangelical societies, prayer meetings, and religious seminars. These religious characteristics of the Great Awakening were shown in later Korean religious meetings and movements such as revival meetings and prayer meetings.

<sup>46</sup> Ryu, Dae Young, *Op.Cit.*, p.53

<sup>47</sup> Lee, Jong Hyeong. *Samuel Austin Moffet: His Life and Work in the Development of the Presbyterian Church of Korea. 1890-1936*. Dissertation. Richmond, VA: Union Theological Seminary. 1983. p.26.

81 out of 135 American missionaries who entered Korea between 1905 and 1909 determined their foreign missions through SVM meetings.<sup>48</sup> For instance, in the twelfth conference of SVM in Nashville in 1891, Horace G. Underwood, a missionary in Korea of that time, and Chi-Ho Yun, a Korean student at Vanderbilt, made speeches and introduced Korea as a prospective mission field. Yun sincerely asked the audience to come and save the souls of Korean people who did not know the Gospel. Moved by their speeches, four students from the southern Presbyterian Church volunteered to come to Korea.<sup>49</sup> <Table 3> shows the influence of SVM on American missionaries in Korea.

As a result, the missionaries reflected the characteristics of evangelical revival movements. They emphasized the direct experiences of holy spirits, prayers, Bible studies and piety in their daily lives. These characteristics influenced active revival movements among Korean churches which had great impacts on the rapid growth of Korean Protestant churches.

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<sup>48</sup> Ryu, Dae Young, *Op.Cit.*, p.49-50.

<sup>49</sup> They were Lewis B. Tate from McCormick Theology Seminary, William M Junkin from Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, Cameron Johnson and Willaim D. Reynolds. They petitioned the permission of the mission boards of the southern Presbyterian church which showed little interest in Korea. They consistently persuaded the boards and fortunately, John T. Underwood, a brother of Horace Underwood, promised to sponsor them. As a result, they came to Korea as Presbyterian missionaries in the late nineteenth century. Ryu, Dae Young, *Ibid.*, p.52; Underwood, Lillias H. 1918. *Op. Cit.*, p.109-110.

< Table 3> The Number of Missionaries from SVM among American Missionaries in Korea<sup>50</sup>

Year	The Total American Missionaries in Korea	The Missionaries through SVM
1906	14	8
1907	43	23
1908	48	29
1909	30	21

## B. The perceptions of American Missionaries

### 1. Dichotomy between Civilization and Barbarians.

They took the lead in defining their settlement based on “a Covenant with God” to create “a city on a hill” as a model for all the world, and people of other Protestant faiths soon also came to see themselves and America in a similar way. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Americans defined their mission in the New World in biblical terms. They were a “chosen people,” on an “errand in the wilderness,” creating “the new Israel” or the “new Jerusalem” in what was clearly “the promised land.” American was the site of a “new Heaven and a new earth, the home of justice,” God’s country. ... this sense of holy mission was easily expanded into millenarian themes of America as “the redeemer nation” and “the visionary republic.”<sup>51</sup>

As Samuel Huntington defines, “the American brand of Protestantism” maintains its strong sense of manifest destiny in which the early Puritan settlers believed. The evangelical enthusiasm of American missionaries in Korea also took

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<sup>50</sup> Ryu, Dae Young, *Ibid.*, p.51

<sup>51</sup> Huntington, Samuel P. *Who Are We?: The Challenges to America’s National Identity*. New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2004.p.64

their roots in Puritan manifest destiny for the world. Thus, they had a strong sense of duty as the conveyors of American manifest destiny.

To American missionaries, Korea was “wilderness” where there was nothing, as New England was to American Puritans even though there were already the North American Natives. The first American Puritans believed that they were destined to enlighten the uncivilized heathens through Christianization. American missionaries showed corresponding attitudes toward Koreans. Lilliad Underwood, a medical missionary and the wife of Horace Underwood, compared themselves to those of the Puritans in New England:

The way the young American came there was this. He belonged to a race of people called Anglo-Saxons, ..... His ancestors had left England, Holland and Scotland, and crossed the Atlantic, to a new country, to gain religious and civil liberty, two hundred years before, and his father and mother, with a spark of the same spirit quickening in their hearts, had crossed a wider ocean, to bring that religion to enslaved peoples.<sup>52</sup>

Their goal was to spread the Gospel but, by their standards, Korea was not civilized enough to accept Christianity and they had to civilize Korea into conforming to western Christian moral and ethic standards. As a result, their evangelical work pursued the civilization of Korean society in the name of Christianity.<sup>53</sup> Korean religious scholar Cho-Hyeon Beom argued that their attempts to westernize Korean societies were based on Christian supremacy and

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<sup>52</sup> Underwood, Lillias H. 1905. *Op.Cit.*, p.11.

<sup>53</sup> Park, Chung-Shin. *Op. Cit.*, p.51.



Eurocentrism.<sup>54</sup> According to Beom, they believed that “non-Western peoples were in a state of ‘lack of Enlightenment.’”<sup>55</sup>

Hidden in the minds of the missionaries in Korea at that time was Americanism, which was a mixture of the psychology of enlightenment and the Protestant faith, in addition to Christian supremacy combined with Eurocentrism. Americanism professed that “America is the perfect and ideal land of people’s dreams, and God has chosen Americans to save the world.” According to this tenet, the notion that world mission was “God’s gift to America (he) bestowed to train the country, “and by virtue of this, that America’s “expansion and prosperity were God’s providence and faith.” Naturally indwelled in the minds of the missionaries.....For them, in the end, spreading the faith and propagating modern Western civilization were one and the same.<sup>56</sup>

Based on such perceptions about non-Christian worlds, American missionaries in Korea believed in their duties of civilizing Korea through their Protestant evangelical works.

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<sup>54</sup> Beom, Cho Hyeon. *Op. Cit.*, p.24.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p.25.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

## 2. Perceptions of Korea

From the points of the views of the American missionaries, Korea was a primitive and uncivilized country which was not ready for the “civil religion” of Protestantism. The following examples illustrated their views as considering Korea lacking civilized development by their standards. First of all, they considered Koreans’ living environments devoid of sanitation as utterly uncivilized. Henry Appenzeller, a Methodist missionary, described Korean streets and houses as “primitive.”

The streets of Seoul are narrow and dirty, and filth is everywhere. Poor people’s houses are very primitive, made of dirt, small and low, dreary and unsanitary.<sup>57</sup>

Similar descriptions are found in Lillias Underwood’s recollection of Korean streets and houses. According to her impression, Korean streets were narrow, filthy and flanked by low mud houses with roofs of thatch or tile. She wrote that Seoul looked somewhat like a vast bed of mushrooms.<sup>58</sup>

The accounts about Korean women’s lives also reflected their views that Korea was far from civilization based on western standards. From their standards, the discrimination of women proved that Korea was still in the stage of pre-modern

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<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p.26.

<sup>58</sup> Huntley, Martha. *Op. Cit.*, p.25.

feudal society. The following quotation illustrates Lillias Underwood's view that the low status of Korean women was an evidence of the lack of civilization and enlightenment.

In Korea a mother doesn't have a name of her own, she isn't even Mrs. "So-and-So" but she's "the little pig's mother" (Toyagi Amonni) or "Peach's mother" always known only as the mother of such a one. You see these ignorant and degraded Koreans seem to think the greatest honor that can befall a woman is to be the mother of somebody. There is no doubt they are very uncivilized and need a great deal of enlightenment.<sup>59</sup>

Furthermore, American missionaries criticized Korean religions for being superstitious. They thought that not just ordinary Koreans were superstitious, but even the educated intellectuals were the same in terms of religious beliefs.

The people lay under the sway of superstitions of all sorts. Sorcerers controlled the doings of every household, were called in at births, sickness and deaths or in making any important decision.....Superstition, fear of ghosts, goblins, and spirits of angry ancestors, all sorts of unseen terrors filled the minds not only of the lowly and the women, but even of many of the highest and proudest of the people.<sup>60</sup>

Furthermore, they downplayed the Korean established national religions including Confucianism and Buddhism as superstitious.

The son of the soil lives in constant terror of the demons and spirits that overpopulate earth, air, and water, for he is without the protection that the

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<sup>59</sup> Underwood, Lillias H. 1905. *Op. Cit.*, p.15.

<sup>60</sup> Underwood, Lillias H. 1918. *Op. Cit.*,p.41.

certainties of science or the strength of pure religion furnishes. With such a people, both Confucianism and Buddhism become the grossest of superstitions.<sup>61</sup>

Based on their judgment of Korean society above, American missionaries perceived themselves as being in the position of enlightening Koreans, an “uncivilized people.” Naturally, they performed their missionary works with a sense of superiority as “civilized people” in Korea and their missionary works reflected these attitudes.

Their judgments were based on their white middle class backgrounds. Their middle class backgrounds were attributed to the policies of the foreign missionary boards. The foreign missionary boards limited the qualification of the applicants to those with at least a college education. Furthermore, according to George Hebert Jones who worked in the foreign mission boards of the Methodist Episcopal churches, the mission boards demanded even particular professional skills such as medical or educational experiences.<sup>62</sup> These standards excluded low-class applicants and those from the high class hesitated to risk their privileges by going to foreign countries for religious missions.

In reality, most of them were the children of middle class families and grew up under comfortable conditions in the newly developed industrial cities in America. All were racially Caucasians and also had college education. Many had

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<sup>61</sup> Griggs, William E. *Corea the Hermit Nation*. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1907. p.445-446. quoted in Beom, Cho Hyeon. *Op. Cit.*, p.28.

<sup>62</sup> Ryu, Dae Young, *Op. Cit.*, p.46.

even professional occupations such as doctors, nurses and teachers. As Arthur Brown described, American missionaries in Korea were an “educated and refined people” and “women of cultivation of good taste.”<sup>63</sup>

During their stays in Korea, American missionaries in Korea tended to maintain their white middle class life styles. Most missionaries lived within the special areas for foreigners which were called “mission compounds,” separated from the residences of the Natives. They purchased houses which belonged to the collapsed royal families or high officials and remodeled them in the western style. The following quote is the description of the Korean native housing Horace Underwood purchased for his residency.

This residence had belonged to a wealthy and noble family, who for some reason had allowed it to fall into partial decay, and when the missionaries came, they found they could buy it with the dear old garden, for a small sum; and could with very little more, put it in good repair. It was merely what is called a bungalow, a one-story house, like all the native houses. Here again we see the need of western enlightenment.<sup>64</sup>

They remodeled the house by the standards of “western enlightenment” and decorated their houses with imported goods and western merchandise such as sewing machines, lamps, organs, etc. They built almost “a miniature America.”<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p.88.

<sup>64</sup> Underwood, Lillias H. 1905. *Op. Cit.*, p.32.

<sup>65</sup> Davis, Daniel M. *Op. Cit.*, p.119; Ryu, Dae Young, *Op. Cit.*,p.58.

There were contrasts between the resident areas of American missionaries and those of the natives. The American missionaries in Korea tried to maintain their life styles rather than assimilate into Korean cultures because they treated Korean styles as “barbaric” and uncivilized.

Most of the streets were narrow and in the rainy season almost impassable, with mud at times to one’s horses’ girths. There were filthy ditches full of stagnant sewage, and a multitude of little thatched or tiled houses, with larger ones in big court yards belonging to nobility; there were interesting stone walls around the city, entered by imposing iron gates; there was a great white-robed throng of natives, and scattered in among them all here and there, enclosed by walls, fair gardens in which were the homes of foreign officials, customs officers, business men and one missionary, Dr. Allen.<sup>66</sup>

This separation from the natives of American missionaries was distinctive from the French Catholic missionaries who came earlier than American Protestant missionaries. Unlike the American missionaries who lived within the particular protected areas designed for foreigners, French missionaries resided in the neighborhoods of the natives, living in the houses of the Korean native commoners and eating their food.<sup>67</sup> This fact contributed to the creation of the images of America as a luxurious and rich country in comparison with other western countries. In reality, according to Brown, the relatively luxurious and rich lives of the missionaries generated desires for American goods among Koreans:

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<sup>66</sup> Underwood, Lillias H. 1918. *Op. Cit.*, p.40-41.

<sup>67</sup> Ryu, Dae Young, *Op. Cit.*, p.86-87.

... the missionaries have been potent influences. The lamps, kerosene oil, watches, clocks, furnaces, glass windows, sewing-machines, and other conveniences in their houses; the agricultural implements in their gardens and machinists' tools in their industrial schools; the improved machinery and methods in their printing-presses; their explanations of the steam-engine, the electric motor, the railway, and the telegraph—these attracted attention and developed desire.<sup>68</sup>

### **C. Influences of American Missionaries**

In the course of Korean modernization from the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, American Protestant missionaries influenced Koreans' acceptance of American standards of civilization. After Japan formally annexed Korea in 1910, there had been no political relationship between Korea and America until Korea gained independence from Japan in 1945. Despite the discontinuation of the official diplomatic relationship with America, the Protestant missionaries maintained contact between the two countries. Even though American merchants stayed in Korea for trade, they were only allowed to stay within the particular free trade areas near the ports. Therefore, the American Protestant missionaries were the exclusive group to make direct contact with Koreans. This condition put Protestant churches in the center of the westernization of Korea and made the American Protestant ethic the central principle in modernization and social enlightenment in modern Korea. Therefore, in the process of evangelizing Koreans, American Protestant missionaries played crucial roles in transferring the American way of life and thoughts to Koreans. American missionaries were not only religious

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<sup>68</sup> Brown, Arthur J. *Op .Cit.*, p.471.

evangelists, but also transmitters of Americanism and the concepts of western civilization to Korean society.

## **1. Abolition of Feudal Traditions**

In Korea, the growth of Protestantism in Korea was associated with the expansion of western civilization based on American Protestantism. In the process of the joining of civilization and American Protestantism, American missionaries encouraged the abolition of Korean feudal traditions and religions which they considered to be antiquated. American missionaries showed strong wills to reform non-Christian elements including Confucianism, Shamanism, Animism, and Buddhism in Korea and to proselytize their followers. Therefore, for Koreans, adopting Christian practices and values was a revolutionary act to the extent of “casting off allegiance to his parents and ancestry and thus violating one of the fundamental precepts of ordinary morality.”<sup>69</sup>

Based on these reformatory attitudes, Protestantism in Korea functioned a progressive role in the Korean social contexts and dealt with specific matters of daily life rather than abstract theology in their teachings. First of all, American missionaries denounced Confucian traditions such as class hierarchy, suppression of women’s rights, and concubinage. Subjugation of women was one of the primary

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<sup>69</sup> Park, Chung-Shin. *Op. Cit.*, p.55; “Obstacles Encountered By Korean Christians,” *The Korean Repository*, vol. I, no. 4. April 1895. p.148



Confucian teachings. Women were inferior to men and only sons were counted as posterities. Women who did not produce male children were cast aside for failing their duties. Under these circumstances, American missionaries taught the concept of equality among human beings, including between men and women, based on the principle that all people were God's children.

As Christianity was accepted more in Korean society, people witnessed the change of attitudes of men toward women. American missionary Sam Moore recorded the testimony of one of his parishioners:

Mr. Chun said that after adopting Christianity he came to dislike his former habit of using 'half talk' to his wife (addressing her as an inferior) while she had to use high language to him..... He mentioned the matter to his mother and said he had determined to use the forms of equality to his wife but his mother objected so strongly that he was obliged to refrain from following what he felt to be a good impulse, which he believed came from a new life within him and not from specific instruction from the (missionary) on the subject. He said that after moving to his present home where he lived alone with his wife, he delighted, and her treatment of him had undergone a marked improvement. And he finished by remarking pointedly: 'The rest of your fellows had better try it'<sup>70</sup>

As in Mr. Chun's testimony, equality of human rights and the improvements of women's lives became a great attractiveness of American Protestantism.

In addition, they instructed Korean Christians to abstain from smoking, drinking, gambling and prostitution which were the worst evils by the Puritanical moral standards. The abandonment of non-Christian traditions and living habits of temperance were minimum requirements of becoming church members. Their

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<sup>70</sup> Huntley, Martha. *Caring, Op. Cit.*, p.77

temperance traditions were based on white conservative middle class morality of American missionaries. For Korean Christians, these moral standards represented the cultures of civilized societies as well as Protestant ethics.

The reform of Korean traditional attitudes toward labor and work was another instance. American missionaries criticized Korean Confucian tradition of treating manual labor and engagement in commerce business as inferior. They emphasized the virtues of pursuit of wealth and habits such as diligence, integrity, and frugality. From the perspectives of American Protestantism, only hard work led to wealth and success and idleness and poverty were almost sins.<sup>71</sup> The following quote illustrates the Methodist Churches' instruction of work ethic to Koreans by using an interrogatory method of teaching.

Q: In Korean tradition, is it good to work or not?

A: Work is not regarded beneficial.

Q: What made you think so?

A: In the first meeting, if someone asks "what do you do for living?" the common answer would be "nothing particular." In the western cultures, the person who answer like that will be regarded as being suspicious.

Q: Is there another example to show that you downplay work?

A: We call lower class people "workers"..... which illustrates that the Oriental culture despises work.

Q: Why is work beneficial to people?

A: It brings strength to body, wealth and sound mind.

Q: Whom are we supposed to teach how to work?

A: It will be right to teach everyone from the son of the king to the son of the humble.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Ryu, Dae Young, *Op. Cit.*, p.253.

<sup>72</sup> Geuriseudo Sinmun. July 4, 1901. quoted in Lee, Man Yeol. *Op. Cit.*, p.410; Ryu, Dae Young, *Ibid.*, p.254

In a religious sense, the emphasis of hard work was based on the faith that an occupation is God's calling and material success is an evidence of God's blessings. Therefore, American Protestantism was critical of Confucian perceptions of labor and contributed to the establishment of the new modern capitalistic concepts of work and wealth.

## **2. The Introduction of Modern Institutions**

It was medicine, not preaching, that opened Korea to the Protestant church. It was education, not evangelism that first commended it to the authorities.<sup>73</sup>

Samuel Hugh Moffett stated that American missionaries started medical and educational services for their evangelical purposes because the Korean government did not permit their missionary work at first. First of all, the missionary schools became models of modern educational institutions. Traditionally, education in Korea was limited to the memorization of Chinese characters and classics. However, as the influence of modern knowledge increased, acquisition of western knowledge and skills became a route to social mobility and wealth. Under these changed conditions, Koreans demanded modern education and Christian schools were best suited to provide it.

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<sup>73</sup> Moffet, Samuel Hugh. *Op. Cit.*,p.122-123.

Henry Appenzeller, a Methodist missionary, founded the first modern school for boys in Seoul in 1886. The King bestowed the name of this school as *Bae Jae Hak Dang*, meaning hall for rearing useful men. Once the school gained royal endorsement, the enrollment grew rapidly. The school building was “one story, of brick, best material inside, entirely foreign style of architecture, the first and only one of its kind in Korea.”<sup>74</sup> Soon after, Horace Underwood, a Presbyterian missionary started *Kyeongsin* School also in Seoul. Since then, American missionaries and Protestant leaders founded hundreds of primary schools around the country and almost all the Protestant churches ran day schools. As a result, by the early twentieth century, Christian schools became the most popular and crowded educational institutions.

We are in the midst of an educational revolution. Schools spring up in a night..... the old Confucian scholars lose their proud seats, giving place to those who know both Chinese and Western learning. So strong has been the leadership of the church that. The course of study used in Christian schools has been the pattern for unbelievers’ schools as well. During the year probably as many as five or six hundred primary and night schools, claiming to teach Western learning have been started by officials and other unbelievers in our territory. The church schools are in the lead of all and influence all.”<sup>75</sup>

In the field of women’s education, Christian schools were revolutionary in Korea. In 1886, a Methodist missionary, Mrs. Mary Scranton founded the first

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<sup>74</sup> Paik, L. George. *The History of Protestant Missions in Korea, 1832-1910*. Seoul, South Korea: Yonsei University Press. 1970. p.82

<sup>75</sup> Moffet, Samuel Hugh. *Op. Cit.*, p.146.

modern school for girls, Ehwa Girls' School. Then, in 1910, Ehwa introduced college degrees for women and the first three women graduated in 1914. A high school girl Helen Kim, who became the president of Ehwa University later, described the first graduate ceremony of Ehwa University:

I sat among the Ewha high school students watching breathlessly as the first three women college graduates marched in, wearing caps and gowns.... Everyone was proud of these potential leaders of the nation. The audience rose and stood in silence. It was a scene that had never before taken place in Korea. For girls to go to college, graduate and enter into professions was an unheard of thing... tears rolled down my cheeks. I looked around and saw that others were crying, too, even some men. They were tears of joy for the accomplishments of girls so long neglected and looked down upon.”<sup>76</sup>

In addition to the introduction of modern education, the functions of medical missions meant more than introduction of modern medical skills and hospitals. Horace Allen's establishment of a hospital, *Jejoongwon*, was the first step. Following in Allen's footsteps, other medical missionaries opened more hospitals. Based on Christian philanthropy and social work, they treated the patients regardless of class and gender, which added egalitarian and philanthropic images to American Protestantism. Christian physicians and nurses founded the first dispensaries and leprosarium. Furthermore, American women doctors provided services for women because Korean male doctors were reluctant to give them medical services. The Methodist missionary, Dr. Meta Howard, started medical work for women in 1887 and the Presbyterian missionary, Lillias Underwood,

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<sup>76</sup> Huntley, Martha. *Op. Cit.*, p.87

opened the O'Neil Dispensary for women and children in 1893. As a result, though by 1930, there were more public and private non-Christian hospitals in Korea,<sup>77</sup> people preferred coming to Christian hospitals because they were kind to strangers and the poor.

In Korea in the first half of the twentieth century, Protestantism played a role as a transmitter of American values and cultures, especially of white middle class Americans, through the missionary activities of American missionaries. In the process, American influences led the modernization of Korea. In addition, these close ties between Americanization and modernization continued after the acquisition of independence of Korea from Japan.

#### **IV. AMERICA AND KOREA AFTER LIBERATION**

##### **A. America and South Korea**

When Korea had achieved liberation from Japanese colonization in 1945, the Korean people expected their complete independence and freedom. However, once Korea gained independence, American troops came to the South and the Soviet Union to the North, dividing Korea along the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel. In spite of the efforts by Korean national leaders, America and the Soviet Union failed to agree to

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<sup>77</sup> There were forty three government and public hospitals in Korea and forty one private, non-Christian hospitals while there were only thirty Christian centers for medical work and most of them were small and inadequate. Moffet, Samuel Hugh. *Op. Cit.*, p.159.

establish a united government on the Korean peninsula. As a result, the United States and pro-American leaders carried out a unilateral election on May 10, 1948 in the South and declared the birth of Republic of Korea, South Korea, on August, 1948. In response to the establishment of the Republic of Korea, North Korea set up a communist government, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, under the leadership of Il-Sung Kim supported by the Soviet Union.<sup>78</sup>

After the national division, South Korea drove the nation toward economic development and industrialization, under American influences. In the process of the survival and development of South Korea, the alliance with America was indispensable. Especially, during the Korean War (1950-1953), the United States suffered about 150,000 casualties for defending South Korea. After the Armistice Agreement between North and South Korea in 1953, the Korean government concluded the Mutual Defense Treaty with the United States and since then, American troops have been stationed in Korea based on this treaty. Since the war, Koreans have considered America as the number one ally, in a so called "alliance forged in blood" which would provide the military protection against any possible conflicts with North Korea. According to the survey of Korean sociologist Hy-Sop Lim, asking what Koreans thought was the most beneficial aspect of America to Korea, most respondents pointed out the roles as liberator and protector of democracy and freedom from communist threats.<sup>79</sup> This perception is related to the

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<sup>78</sup> Park, Chung-Shin. *Op. Cit.*, p. 158-159; Kang, Wi Jo. *Op. Cit.*, p.73-74.

<sup>79</sup> Lim's research shows that 22.90 percent out of the repliers answered the military support during the Korean War to the question of the most beneficial elements of the United States to Korea. Lim,

images of the United States as a country to help the weak and the poor based on the Christian altruism, which were established in the early twentieth century.

The cooperation in national defense and economy brought the increase of American influences on the Korean society by and large. To Koreans, America became a representative country which they took as a model of an ideal society. An article in one of the prestigious monthly magazines, *Sindonga*, by Chae-Bong No, one of the Korean intellectuals, illustrates this image of America as the most powerful country

.....when we became acquainted with America, our nation was weak, and America had just emerged as a superpower in the Cold War system. Furthermore, America had just constructed a system of world peace under its leadership on the basis of its immense military and economic might. When such a nation as America appeared before our eyes, we could not help but look upon it as being all-powerful.<sup>80</sup>

## **B. Christianity in Korea after Liberation.**

After the liberation from Japan and the establishment of pro-American government, Christian churches stood for the ruling side, becoming the major

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Hy-Sop. "Hanmi Moonhwa Kwangae-e Daehan Yeongu (Research on Korean-American Cultural Relations)" Asiatic Research Center of Korea University, ed. *American Influences on Korean Culture*. Seoul: Hyeonam-sa, 1984: 76-99. p.94

<sup>80</sup> No, Chae-Bong. "Amerika ui Jaejomyeong (Re-Illumination of America)" *Sindonga*, No. 7. 1973: 70-76. quoted in Lim, Hy-Sop. "The Perception of the United States after Liberation in 1945" in Lew, Young Ick & Byong-Kie Song & Ho-Min Yang & Hy-sop Lim. Trans. By Michael Finch. *Korean Perceptions of the United States: A History of Their Origins and Formation*. Seoul: Jimoondang, 2006: 307-364. p.317.



supportive groups of Syungman Rhee, the first president of South Korea. The Rhee government was pro-Christian due to his own Christian background and American support for his rule. Rhee was himself a Protestant elder and Vice President Tae-Young Ham was a Protestant minister. Rhee's pro-Christian tendency was revealed in the fact that he took an oath of office with his hand on the Bible at his presidential inauguration on August 15 of 1948. Furthermore, at the opening ceremony of the National Assembly, he asked Christian pastor Yungyeong Yi to lead a prayer of thanks, even if it was not on the printed program.<sup>81</sup>

In addition, Protestant churches were the main supporters of anticommunist ideology under Rhee's government. After North Korea established a communist government, many Christians were exiled to the South because of the anti-Christian environment of North Korea. The refugees from the North were very supportive of anti-communist policies of South Korea and regarded anticommunist ideology as one of the Christian principles.<sup>82</sup> Therefore, the development of Christian churches from the 1950s to 1970s was attributed to the strong anti-communist ideology and South Korea's close relationship of America. Under the strong influence of America, Christianity gained a higher status than other religions in Korea.

In addition, Christian churches helped people suffering from post-war poverty through philanthropy as they did during the colonization period. As a

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<sup>81</sup> Park, Chung Shin. *Op. Cit.*, p.173-174

In the first National assembly set up in 1948, 42 percent of the elected assembly men were Christians whereas only 4 percent of the population were Christians. Korean attitudes, p.249.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p.177.

result, Christianity constituted a key element of American positive images of America overlapped with the standards of civilized society including “superior morality, enlightened thinking, and clean living.” Christianity was associated with modernity compared with traditions which were considered to be engaged in Korean “backward” culture such as shamanism and traditional ancestor worship. Furthermore, in terms of gender relations, Christianity protected gender equality against Korea’s long-time Confucian hierarchical tradition between men and women.<sup>83</sup>

Through the twentieth century Korean history, Protestant churches have played more than religious roles. Protestantism has been closely associated with Korean modernization and social reforms and stood in opposition to Korean traditional cultures represented by Confucianism and Shamanism. In the process of western domination of the world, modernization was equated with westernization while Korean tradition was considered as relatively primitive and uncivil. In Korea, because of continuous American influences on Korea on a large scale, civilization and social reforms became closely related to Americanization. This fact contributed to the constitution of the idealized images of the United States in Korea.

## V. THREE FRAMEWORKS FOR KOREANS TO PERCEIVE THE UNITED STATES

In conclusion, I will conceptualize Korean perceptions of the United States based on three frames of reference of perceiving other nations: They are a traditional Sinocentric view, a dichotomy to divide the world into allied and enemy nations, and a perception to separate advanced from developed nations. Therefore, according to the categorization by three those frames, the United States become a country at the center of the world, Korea's allied country and the most advanced country in the world.

First of all, Korea traditionally had a Sinocentric world view, seeing China as the center of the world and Korea as "small China." In light of this perspective, Koreans have perceived countries other than China, as barbaric. The anti-western attitudes of the nineteenth century in Korea were partly based on this perspective. However, in the twentieth century, the United States took over China's role. American Studies scholar Sangdawn Lee named America as Korea's new big brother in his book which overviews the American influences on Korea during the 1970s.<sup>84</sup> Lee took a concept of "big brother" from the previous historical relationship between Korea and China. Korea gave respect to China as a younger brother based on the Confucian hierarchical social order among people and nations. Under this view, Chinese cultures were regarded as the standards of the high class

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<sup>83</sup> Abelmann, Nancy & John Lie. *Blue Dreams: Korean Americans and the Los Angeles Riots*. Harvard University Press. 1995. p.69

<sup>84</sup> Lee, Sangdawn. *Big Brother, Little Brother: The American Influence on Korean Culture in the Lyndon B. Johnson Years*, Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2002.

lives and better societies. Therefore, Lee's addressing of America as a big brother indicated the phenomenon that American culture became the symbol of high standards of living in Korea.

The second one is a dichotomous perception to divide the nations into allies and enemies. In the first half of the twentieth century, the United States was considered to be Korea's allied nation against Japan, because America did not intend to colonize Korea. Despite the indifferent attitudes of the American government in Korean issues, Koreans sought support from America whenever their country was in crisis. In addition, after liberation and the national division, America became the number one ally of South Korea against the threats of North Korea. Both historical environments made the United States the closest country which, Koreans believe, would take a side with them in all cases.

Finally, Koreans have regarded the United States as the most advanced country based on a perception to separate the countries into advanced and underdeveloped nations. This perception has been influenced by the western civilization ideological views. In particular, as previously discussed, American missionaries contributed to the introduction of the white middle class Protestant cultures and values as standards of civilization in contrast with Korean traditional cultures and values. In addition, witnessing the luxurious lives of American missionaries, Koreans regarded living like Americans as a symbol of their success in terms of living standards. After liberation, Koreans had more chances to reach American conveniences and commodities through contact with American soldiers

stationed in Korea and the increasing trade between American and Korea. Because only a small number of people could afford to purchase these products in the early period of Korean economic development, possession and consumption of these American luxurious goods at home became a symbol of high social status.<sup>85</sup> The increasing opportunities to watch American lives through media fantasized western styles of living as well. Therefore, in the process of modernization and economic development, the United States has become a model of an advanced and civilized nation. Koreans eagerly strove to become an advanced nation by following the examples the United States.

In conclusion, the basic views of America as a civilized, wealthy and powerful country were inherited from the early twentieth century and strengthened after the establishment of pro-American government in South Korea. American ways of life have become the symbols of high standards of living. Whether American ways of life were looked upon highly or criticized for their vulgarities was another matter. It was crucial that it meant to be well off to live like Americans.

The strong American influence on the Korean society motivated Koreans to leave for America for the purpose of taking advantage of better opportunities and lives no matter whether their immigration aimed at settling in America permanently or temporarily. It did not matter whether they respected American cultures and societies or not. They regarded living in America as a symbol of their success and

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<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p.57.

as a way to promote their social status in terms of living standards. Then, Koreans' yearning to live in America encouraged their immigration to America after 1965 and these post-1965 immigrants constituted one of the significant new minority groups in America and made up most of the current Korean American communities in the United States.

### CHAPTER 3 . KOREANS IN AMERICA

As examined in the previous chapter, American values based on Christianity have affected all aspects of Korean life. As Edward T. Chang, a scholar on ethnic studies pointed out, “many Korean immigrants have been exposed to the American values of democracy, Christianity, meritocracy, and individualism before their arrival in the United States regardless of their education and occupational background.”<sup>1</sup> However, despite this pre-immigrant Americanization, Koreans had limited knowledge about the reality of American society. Their perceptions of the United States depended on contact with middle class lives of the white American missionaries and on the stereotypical images of Americans represented in the media. The following illustrates this pre-immigration perceptions held by Koreans.

When my family moved to Los Angeles from Korea in 1973, I expected to see a beautiful city with nice cars and nice streets, but the area we moved into was nothing like that. My father had opened a hamburger shop at Vermont and Manchester called Tokyo Café. We moved to a place right behind the shop. The area was ninety-eight percent black, and gang activities were intense. It was a real culture shock for us. I had thought of America as very white and Anglo-Saxon.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Chang, Edward T. “New Urban Crisis: Korean-African American Relations.” Kim, Kwang Chung ed., *Koreans in the Hood: Conflict with African Americans*. Baltimore, Maryland: The John Hopkins University Press. 1999: 39-59. p.43.

<sup>2</sup> Hull, Alexander. “Cruise Control” in Yu, Eui-Young Yu & Elaine H. Kim, ed. *East to America : Korean American Life Stories*, New York: New Press, 1996: 219-229. p.221. Hull was born in Seoul in 1962 and came to Los Angeles in 1973 with his family. His father ran a hamburger shop in South Central Los Angeles.

According to the Koreans' expectations, America should be "a beautiful city with nice cars and nice streets," which is dominantly "white and Anglo-Saxon."

The post-1965 Korean immigrants had experienced the post-war poverty, political unrest from authoritarian regimes and American influence on Korean modernization. Exposed to the idealized images of the United States, the post-1965 Korean immigrants ventured to come to a foreign country and they expected better lives and educational opportunities for themselves and their children in comparison with their lives in Korea. Their relative satisfaction/dissatisfaction with immigrant lives made Korean immigrants focus primarily on the achievement of their upward mobility in a short time and a willingness to sacrifice everything for educating their children. The description by Kurt Andersen, a Journalist from *Time* magazine, reflected this characteristic of Korean immigrants

South Korean immigrants also tend to be middle class, or working slavishly to get there. Their numbers have gone up 16-fold since 1970, with virtually all of the newcomers settling in a 2 sq.-mi. swath along jumbled Olympic Boulevard. They seem eager to become full-fledged American bourgeois, holding golf tournaments and staging beauty contests. .... Hun Yum, 40, opened his Hoban Restaurant on Western Avenue a decade ago, and profits have increased tenfold. Yet, after 14 years in L.A., he speaks barely passable English. Yum has not refused to become fluent. He is just too busy. "Money is our first priority," he says. "We have to work first, and then we have time to learn the language. Or our children will."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Andersen, Kurt. "The New Ellis Island" *Time*. Monday, June 13, 1983.



According to Andersen's portrayal, Korean immigrants were excessively obsessed with the achievement of "full-fledged American bourgeois" lives they had imagined before immigration.

In addition, an Asian American "model minority" myth prevalent among the American public encouraged Korean immigrants to believe that they could overcome disadvantages they faced as a racial minority in America simply through the achievement of material success. Adopting the model minority images, Korean immigrants praised the success of other Korean immigrants gained by working long hours and overcoming difficulties in their immigrant lives. As a result, they showed relatively less interest in American society than in their own ethnic communities, including their Korean counterparts.

This chapter will demonstrate how religious narratives within Korean American ethnic churches reflected this characteristic of post-1965 Korean immigrants. Their religious interpretations of their immigrant experiences show how they make sense of their transnational experiences and lives in America. For this purpose, this chapter will discuss the factors contributing to Koreans' apathy toward American society based on the history of Korean immigration. Then, I will examine the religious narratives in sermons given by influential religious leaders in Korean American communities.

In Korean immigrant churches, the roles of sermons of preachers are important in comparison with those of other ethnic groups. Reverend Tae Kyung Kim in a Korean American Church in La Crescenta, California, surveyed new members of his church to ask what made them decide to join the current church.

Then, about 80% of new members responded that the first priority was the quality of the sermon. According to Kim, this result contrasted with his previous experiences in Caucasian churches, where newcomers decided to join the church more because of their friends, fellowship or church program while the pastor's ability to preach was less important.<sup>4</sup> Based on this comparative statistical result, Kim concluded that what Korean Americans needed the most was "the message that they could be comforted, encouraged, and changed."<sup>5</sup>

In addition, under the influence of Confucian hierarchical and patriarchic traditions in Korea, the authority of male preachers is relatively strong. Church members tend to give absolute authority to pastors and uncritically believe the pastor's interpretation and his application of the Scriptures. People often say, "I believe so, because my pastor said so."

Through the examination of their religious narratives, I will discuss the individualization of their immigrant lives in America in the transnational context between America and Korea in the 1970s and 1980s. The identities of Korean immigrants were more "Koreans in America," rather than Korean Americans as one of the minority groups in America.

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<sup>4</sup> Kim, Tae Kyung. *Transformative Preaching in the Transitioning Korean American Church*. Ph.D. Dissertation. Fuller Theological Seminary. 2000. p.1-2

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

## I. BRIEF HISTORY OF KOREAN IMMIGRATION

On January 13, 1903, the first 102 Koreans aboard the *SS Gaelic* arrived in the port of Honolulu<sup>6</sup> and about 7,000 more Koreans immigrated to Hawaii between 1903 and 1905. However, Korean immigration stopped in 1905 because the Japanese government which was a protectorate of Korea, no longer issued visas to Koreans in an effort to protect Japanese immigrants in the United States.<sup>7</sup> These early Korean immigrants decided to leave Korea in order to escape from their despair in Korea including Japanese repression and the continuous famine at the turn of the century. During the same period, the Hawaiian planters in sugar plantations were seeking another cheap labor source to replace the Chinese and Japanese workers because they had raised well-organized protests against the plantations for working excessive hours and low wages.<sup>8</sup> These push and pull factors motivated the first arrival of Korean immigrants in the United States.

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<sup>6</sup> They were composed of 56 men, 21 women and 25 children. Patterson, Wayne, *The Ilse: First-Generation Korean Immigrants in Hawaii, 1903-1973* Honolulu, Hawaii: Center for Korean Studies. 2000 p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> Japanese military control forced the Korean government to ban further immigration to America except for the women, so-called picture brides, who traveled to America to meet their prospective husbands. That ban was because Japan wanted to protect the Japanese in America from competition with Korean laborers because the Japanese laborers came to Hawaii earlier. Japan also restricted Korean immigration due to a growing free-Korea movement among Koreans living abroad. Joselit, Jenna Weissman. *Immigration and American Religion*. New York: Oxford University Press. 2001. p.110

<sup>8</sup> Kim, Jung Ha. *Bridge-Makers and Cross-Breakers: Korean-American Women and the Church*. Atlanta, GA; Scholars Press. 1997.p.3

After the suspension of the first wave of Korean immigration from 1903 to 1905, Korean immigration resumed in 1910 based on the Gentlemen's Agreement concluded between Japan and the United States in 1907. This agreement banned further immigration from Japan and permitted only entrance of families and wives of the male permanent Japanese residents. The American government applied this agreement to Korean male residents as well. As a result, approximately 1,100 Korean picture brides<sup>9</sup> entered the United States between 1910 and 1924.<sup>10</sup> However, the immigration of picture brides stopped in 1924 with the new Immigration and Naturalization Act in America which practically banned all immigration from Asia except those who came as students.<sup>11</sup>

During this early period of immigration, the Koreans were almost “invisible” and were often mistaken for Japanese or Chinese due to their small

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<sup>9</sup> The term ‘picture bride’ or ‘picture marriage’ refers to the exchange of photographs between the prospective bride and groom through an intermediary. After both sides agree and the groom pays the appropriate fees, the bride travels to Hawaii and is married at the immigration station to the man she has only seen in photographs. According to Patterson, even though it is not clear how and when the Korean picture bride system began, the first picture brides came to Hawaii around 1910. Then in the period between 1910 and 1924, approximately six hundred to one thousand women came to Hawaii as picture brides to equalize the ratio of men to women. Patterson, Wayne, 2000. *Op. Cit.*, p. 80.

<sup>10</sup> By 1920, 21% of adult Korean immigrants in Hawaii was women including 1,700 who had remigrated to the mainland. Kim, Kwang Chung, R. Stephen Warner, & Ho-Youn Kwon, “Korean-American Religion in international Perspective,” Kwang Chung Kim, R. Stephen Warner, & Ho-Youn Kwon, ed., *Korean-Americans and Their Religions: Pilgrims and Missionaries from a Different Shore*, University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001, p. 9

<sup>11</sup> During the period between 1910 and 1945, about 541 students came to the United States to study at American schools including universities. Most of them escaped to America from Japanese rule over Korea and supported independence movements overseas. Yoon, In-Jin. *On My Own: Korean Businesses and Race Relations in America*. Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1997. p.53; Jung Ha. 1997. *Op. Cit.*, p.4

number relative to other Asians.<sup>12</sup> They also experienced extreme racial discrimination in America against Asians. Therefore, they hardly considered the United States as their permanent homes and most immigrants dreamed of going back to their home country. In reality, about 1,000 Koreans of the first wave of Korean immigrants eventually went back to Korea.<sup>13</sup>

The Korean War (1950-1953) opened a new era in the history of Korean immigration to America. Korea obtained national independence from Japan in 1945, but the civil war between North and South Korea broke out in 1950. The war made Americans more aware of the existence of Koreans due to the participation of American troops in the war. Furthermore, the war resulted in the entrance of war brides and war orphans adopted by American families,<sup>14</sup> although the 1924 immigration law was still in effect. As a result, this second wave of Korean immigration led to the doubling of the size of the Korean community in America

Despite the continuing entrance of Koreans to America since the Korean War, the number still remained small until the 1960s. The large scale of Korean

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<sup>12</sup> There were 50,000 Chinese (1853-1900) and 180,000(1885-1907) Japanese immigrants in Hawaii while there were only 7,500 Koreans during those periods in Hawaii. Patterson, Wayne, 2000. *Op. Cit.*, p.5.

<sup>13</sup> Yu, Eui-Young & Peter Choe, "Korean Population in the United States as Reflected in the Year 2000 U.S. Census." *Amerasia Journal* 29:3 (2003-2004): 2-21. p.2

<sup>14</sup> After the Korean War, from 1950 to 1964, 6423 GI brides and 5,348 orphaned adoptees came to America. Korean wives of GI's entered the United States as non-quota immigrants as the spouses of American citizens under the 1952 McCarran Walter Act. They were mostly poorly educated, unskilled and the age difference between husbands and wives was big. Among war orphans adopted by American families during 1955 to 1966, 46 percent were "white" Koreans, 41 percent were "full" Koreans, and the rest were "black" Koreans. They were adopted through an inter-country adoption program. Kim, Jung Ha. 1997. *Op. Cit.*, p.5  
The number of Korean adopted children and Korean women who came to America as brides of Americans, reaches more than 100,000 respectively. Yu, Eui-Young & Peter Choe, *Ibid.*, p.3

immigration followed the amendment of the Immigration Act in 1965 which abolished the restriction of immigration from Asia. Since then, the large number of Korean immigrants arrived in America every year and the continual influx of Korean immigrants augmented Korean American communities. According to the 2000 census, out of the total Koreans in America, 65 percent were reported to be foreign born and only 35 percent were U.S. born. In addition, even though the annual number of Koreans admitted declined steadily in the 1990s, recording the lowest level in 1999, it has gradually increased since 2000.<sup>15</sup> As a result, according to the 2005 U.S. Census, the population of Koreans in America reached over a million, recording 1,246,240.<sup>16</sup> Accordingly, the post-1965 immigrants make a majority of the current Korean American communities, and they are still predominantly young, foreign-born and Korean speaking despite their over one hundred year immigrant history.

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<sup>15</sup> While only 107 Koreans were admitted between 1941 and 1950, the number of admitted Koreans as permanent residents increased rapidly to 6,231 between 1950 and 1960, 34,526 between 1961 and 1970, 267,638 between 1971 and 1980, and 333,746 between 1981 and 1990. The number of annual admittance has declined steadily after reaching its peak of 35,849 in 1987. The number of Korean immigrants admitted in 1999 was only 12,301, the lowest level recorded since 1972. The number of Koreans admitted has increased gradually since, and it was 20,742 in 2001. A total of 827,156 Korean immigrants were admitted to the U.S. between 1948 and 2001. Yu, Eui-Young & Peter Choe, *Ibid.*, p.5

<sup>16</sup> The total number of Koreans in America is estimated to be about 2 million including approximately 250,000 illegal immigrants, over 50,000 students and non-permanent residents who are staying for extended period. *Dong-A Ilbo*, (Dong-A Daily Newspaper) Oct. 27, 2007.

## II. POST-1965 IMMIGRANTS

### A. American Fever

Along with several other factors including the changes of U.S. immigration policies, the fantasized images of the United States as a country of wealth and advanced culture motivated Koreans to immigrate to America. Anthropologist Kyeyoung Park explained this characteristic of post-1965 Korean immigrants: “Koreans do not emigrate because they cannot survive in their home country but because they dream about America... all immigrants are fed by cultural colonialism from America. In Korea, this is described as American fever.”<sup>17</sup>

A cause of Koreans’ “American fever” traced back to the contact with American missionaries. In the process of Korea’s modernization in the early twentieth century, American missionaries introduced white middle class Protestant cultures and values as standards of civilization in contrast with Korean traditional cultures and values. Witnessing the luxurious lives of American missionaries, Koreans regarded living like Americans as a symbol of their success.

After liberation, Koreans had more chances to reach American conveniences and commodities through contact with American soldiers stationed in

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<sup>17</sup> In an interview by Kyeyoung Park, a respondent remarked, “Without any deep thought, I was just eager to go to America. I was told again and again that America is a wonderful and beautiful country, full of gold, indeed a paradise in this world. In a word, I had the American fever(*migukpyeong*).”

Park, Kyeyoung. *The Korean American Dream: Immigrants and Small Business in New York City*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. 1997. p.29.

Korea. For Koreans who were experiencing extreme poverty in the 1960s, relatively affluent lives of American soldiers contributed to their dreaming of America. In the following quote, a Korean American man recalled his impression from the contact with American armies.

When I was growing up in Korea in the 1960s, life was very difficult. We were very regimented, forced to have our hair cut short and forced to wear uniforms to school. I faced a lot of economic hardships. We did not always have enough to eat. Sometimes all of my family members had to share one egg. I came into contact with American soldiers when I was young. It seemed to me that they were all able to eat well every day. They ate lots of meat. I remember thinking that if I went to America, I could eat like that too, even if I was a beggar in America. Like all other Koreans, I had to serve in the Korean military. I remember being always hungry and always cold. The U.S. soldiers would come out of their tents in weather that was twenty degrees below zero Centigrade wearing only their underwear. In those days, blue jeans from American were so popular. If I could ever afford a pair of jeans, I would not wear them, I would just look at them. To me, America seemed like heaven.<sup>18</sup>

Koreans who were experiencing extreme poverty in the 1960s dreamed of American affluence. However, since only a small number of people could afford to purchase these products in the early period of Korean economic development, possession and consumption of these American luxurious goods at home became a symbol of high social status.<sup>19</sup> The increasing opportunities to watch American lives through media fantasized western styles of living as well. Therefore, they

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<sup>18</sup> Ku, Dong Hwan (pseudonym) "War Zone" in Yu, Eui-Young Yu & Elaine H. Kim, ed. *Op.Cit.*, p.37

Dong Hwan Ku was born in Korea in 1958. He immigrated to America in 1984 when he was twenty-six years old by marrying a immigrant woman who was living in the U.S.

<sup>19</sup> Lee, Sang-Dawn. *Big Brother, Little Brother: The American Influence on Korean Culture in the Lyndon B. Johnson Years*, Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2002. p.57.



decided to immigrate to America to obtain American ways of life which they thought would be urban middle-class lifestyles.

In sum, the basic views of America as a wealthy country were inherited from the early twentieth century and strengthened after the establishment of pro-American government in South Korea. It did not matter whether they respected American cultures and societies or not. They regarded living in America as a symbol of their success and as a way to promote their social status in terms of living standards. Then, Koreans' yearning to live in America encouraged their immigration to America and these post-1965 immigrants constituted one of the significant new minority groups in America and made up most of the current Korean American communities in the United States.

In addition to ideal images of America as a country of wealth, Koreans had a rosy picture of it as a country of freedom and equality to everyone. Koreans believed that the United States was a country promising individual prosperity, democratic freedom, equal gender relations and family structures. Therefore, they believed that they could achieve their dreams even if they were in the status of minority in America. Korean immigrants had somewhat naïve views of multiculturalism, which contends that the United States is a country composed of diverse racial and ethnic groups on equal footing:

As we know well, America is the country of immigration, liberty, and opportunity. America is not Melting Pot, but Salad Bowl in which different languages, customs, cultures from different races are not smelted into one another. In short, this is the country where each presents his own charm and

taste as they are. Therefore, we have to fulfill God's will as we are created no matter if we are roses, peonies, mums, poppies or Roses of Sharon.<sup>20</sup>

Two hundred years ago, the thirteen states raised the first American flag with [thirteen] stripes and thirteen stars on white background. At that time, it is said that Americans sorted out good wool, Italians trimmed, the Swiss reeled off, Turkish dyed, Belgians weaved, Germans dried, the Scottish cut it out, the French measured, English sewed, the Irish put the ribbon on it, Polish ironed and the Asian Indian raised the flag. This illustrates the spirit of the United States of America. They found unity and harmony among diversity. Though America is a market of races and seems to allow too much freedom, it is a powerful nation because everyone becomes one in the time of national crisis.<sup>21</sup>

These idealized and naïve perceptions of Korean immigrants caused them to be unaware of American reality.

## **B. Disparity between America and Korea**

Korean Americans, the first generation in particular, tend to measure their current status or achievement by comparing their lives in the U.S. with their counterparts in Korea. Koreans came to America dreaming of better lives than back in the "old country," and the disparities between America and Korea in economic

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<sup>20</sup> Joo, Jeong Bae. "mugungwha in Los Angeles" (The Rose of Sharon in Los Angeles). *Hanmaeum*. Vol. 18. Sep. 29. 1986. p.20. Roses of Sharon is the Korean national flower to symbolize Korean heritage.

<sup>21</sup> Lim, Dong-Sun. "Woori-neun Hananim-kkeseo I-ttange Bonaesin Jae-I ui Cheonggyodo.(We are the Second Puritan sent to America by God.)" *Vision of Diaspora*. Los Angeles, CA: The Christian Herald U.S.A. 2002. p.335-340. p.339.

and political development in 1970s and 1980s made Korean immigrants satisfied with their immigrant lives and overlook the problems in American society.

After the Korean War, Korea suffered from war-stricken poverty and diverse side effects from rapid industrialization and urbanization including high competition and widening gaps between haves and have-nots. In addition, the insecurity from political conditions such as the threat of war from North Korea and political authoritarianism encouraged Koreans to immigrate to America. In the sense of democratic politics, Koreans regarded America as the most legitimate liberal democratic country and Korean democracy as being far from legitimate by western standards.

Since the establishment of democratic government in South Korea in 1948, the dictatorial leaders of the Korean government had suppressed human rights in the name of the protection of democratic ideology. The first republic under the leadership of Syngman Rhee ended in 1960 by a bloody student demonstration on April 19, 1960 which is known as the “April Student Revolution.”<sup>22</sup> As a result, Rhee resigned and left for America. However, the political unrest did not end with that. The successive leaders lacked the leadership to stop political instability in Korea. Under these turbulent circumstances, general Chung-Hie Park seized power. After that, his military dictatorship lasted for eighteen years until he was assassinated in 1979. During his rule, continuous demonstrations against his

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<sup>22</sup> The fraudulent election of 1960 provided momentum for this demonstration. Rhee and the Liberal Party enacted the election laws favoring them. Then, in the 1960 presidential election, Rhee and his supporting Party forced the police to vote for Rhee and arrested those who refused to do. This political corruption of Rhee’s regime caused the severe student demonstrations and a large number of students were sacrificed and injured by indiscriminate suppression by the police.

authoritarian regime proclaimed it anti-democrat. Violent political conflicts brought about the use of armed force to suppress protests, causing many to be arrested.

Another big political protest and undemocratic repression by the ruling government took place in the city of Kwangju in 1980 under the president, Doo-Hwan Chun who was a leader of the military government. In reaction to the protest, Chun enforced nationwide martial law and ordered all colleges and universities to close in Seoul. Nevertheless, the students continued their protests in other cities and Chun called the army to stop the demonstrations.<sup>23</sup> This demonstration is historically notorious for its bloody repression of demonstrators and curtailing of all means of communication including radio, TV and newspaper in the city of Kwangju. These frequent political demonstrations and the brutality of government forces caused Korean people to wish for a democratic society like America, encouraging their determination to leave Korea for America.

Another strong motivation for the immigration of the South Koreans is education for themselves as well as their children. Because the education in America benefited the social mobility in South Korea, a number of students went to America to study. By 1991-1992, the number of South Korean students recorded the fifth largest group in the United States after China, Japan, Taiwan and India.<sup>24</sup> The number of those who studied in the United State increased and the graduates of

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<sup>23</sup> Kang, Wi Jo. *Christ and Caesar in Modern Korea: A History of Christianity and Politics*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press. 1997. p.118.

<sup>24</sup> Abelmann, Nancy & John Lie. *Blue Dreams: Korean Americans and the Los Angeles Riots*. Harvard University Press. 1995. p.60

American schools began to make up new elite groups in Korean society. According to the statistics of the Korean Ministry of Education, out of the total number of 12,370 students who went abroad from 1945 to 1973, 10,789 studied in the United States. Then, 70 or 80 percent of those who returned from their studies were employed in high positions in universities and educational institutions as well as in government and business.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, many selected elite members in the government, business, military or media visited the United States on short training programs. Accordingly, the direct experiences of American education or institutions became the avenues of the advancement of social status in Korea.

In addition, the obsessive competition in college entrance made them leave for the more open educational opportunities for their children. In Korea, educational achievement has been the most critical factor in social mobility. However, excessive competition and trauma of college entrance examination blocked educational opportunities. Therefore, the American Dream appealed to Korean immigrants because Korea has relatively higher blocks to social mobility and more limited opportunities for education than America. Interviews by anthropologists Nancy Abelmann and John Lie illustrate the comparison of the two countries in the education of children: “Educating (through college) my children in Korea was like a star in heaven (that is, unattainable). But here (in the United States) there was a chance.” Another interview by them also remarked that “The

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<sup>25</sup> Lim, Hy-Sop. “The Perception of the United States after Liberation in 1945” in Lew, Young Ick & Byong-Kie Song & Ho-Min Yang & Hy-sop Lim. Trans. By Michael Finch. *Korean Perceptions of the United States: A History of Their Origins and Formation*. Seoul: Jimoondang, 2006: 307-364. p.330.

United States is such a big land, and after all—if you go for it—anyone can get a Ph.D.”<sup>26</sup> As shown in these interviews, Korean Americans believed that unlike Korea, anyone can make achievements commensurate with their efforts in America. As a result, Korean immigrants dedicated themselves to the success of their children and could withstand all those difficulties because their children relatively better educational opportunities than in Korea. The following testimony by a Korean immigrant presents his satisfaction with American immigrant lives based on the entrance of his children into UCLA which only “specially excellent” students could enter in Korea:

I am thankful for the opportunities to send my three children to the university. How hard would it to educate three children at UCLA from Korea? I also appreciate that my children didn't get off the tracks and are sincere in attending churches following our family motto “God First.” How thankful I am that they are raised neither to be specially excellent nor to be below average and could go to a good school.<sup>27</sup>

In conclusion, the disparity between America and Korea caused relative satisfaction with the immigrant lives among Korean immigrants.

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<sup>26</sup> Abelman, Nancy & John Lie. 1995. *Op. Cit.*, p.72.

<sup>27</sup> Deacon Kim, Joon-gi. Gamsahal Jogeun (Reasons to be Thankful). *Hanmaeum*, 1996. 11. Vol. 54.

### **C. Koreatown**

The concentration of the businesses and lives of Korean immigrants in Koreatown, an ethnic enclave, caused the concerns of Korea immigrants to focus on their own communities rather than on the American social context. “Koreatown” refers to the place in which the majority of Korean immigrants resided and Korean businesses were concentrated in American big cities. It served as the major destination for incoming Korean immigrants and offered economic opportunities as well as cultural resources and social networks for the newly arrived immigrants.

Korean immigrants had established Koreatowns in most of the large cities throughout the United States. Among them, the largest Koreatown was situated west of downtown Los Angeles and north of South Central because most Korean immigrants settled on the west coast. In 1990, nearly 260,000 Korean Americans settled in California, of whom 200,000 were in the Los Angeles area while only 82,000 Koreans lived in New York City. Therefore, in the 1990 U.S. census, 44.4 percent of Koreans settled on the west coast.<sup>28</sup>

In terms of population concentration, Koreans showed the highest concentration in the Los Angeles area. According to the “index of concentration” for Los Angeles County and Orange County population in Koreatown in 1980, “the relative concentration of Koreans was 8.6 times greater than that for the general

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<sup>28</sup> Jo, Moon H. *Korean Immigrants and the Challenge of Adjustment*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1999. p.14-15.

population, 4.3 times greater than other Asians, 4.4 times greater than Blacks, 5.9 times greater than Latinos, and 19.0 times greater than whites.”<sup>29</sup> This result shows the Korean American daily lives in this area were confined within Koreatown, which served as the nucleus for the Korean community in Southern California. They did not have to speak English because they had all the Korean language services including CPA offices, law offices, department stores and medical hospitals.

The close family ties among Korean immigrants also contributed to the isolation of Korean immigrants. The post-1965 immigrants came as families and in particular, as an outcome of the 1976 amendment, family reunification became the main channel of immigration, so-called chain migration.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, Korean immigrants depended on the resources of family members’ labors in their small businesses. As a result, staying around Korean ethnic communities, they worked and lived with their families and other Koreans and they hardly had immediate contact with non-Korean groups.

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<sup>29</sup> Yu, Eui-Young, Peter Choe, Sang Il Han & Kimberly Yu. “Emerging Diversity: Los Angeles’ Koreatown, 1990-2000” *Amerasia Journal* 30:1(2004):25-52.p.29.

“Index of concentration is the ratio of the proportion of one group’s population in a sub-area to the proportion of the total population in the same area. This measure is also named as “location quotient” elsewhere.(Emrys Jones and John Eyles, *An Introduction to Social Geography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977.)” from footnote 13 in the same article, p.42.

<sup>30</sup> In 1972, 45 percent of South Korean immigrants came under occupational or nonfamily preference, but only 6 percent in 1983. The 1976 amendment limited the entry of professionals by lowering the preference level of professional immigrants and by restricting immigration of foreign medical school graduates

Abelmann, Nancy & John Lie. 1995. *Op. Cit.*, p.75-76.



#### D. Christian Churches

There was no regular Korean church nearby, and even if there had been one, we may not have attended much: Because of my father's low opinion of Koreans who got their U.S. degrees by studying theology with the help of American missionaries, our family was militantly non-Christian, which in the 1990s, when the vast majority of Koreans in this country devotedly attend Christian Churches, would make us considered by many to be not Korean American at all.<sup>31</sup>

Korean American English professor Elaine H. Kim noted that Korean American Protestant churches have been a central ethnic institution in Korean American communities. Statistically, it was known that by 1989 there were there were approximately three thousand Korean American Christian churches in the United States.<sup>32</sup> In addition, over 70 percent of Korean immigrants were involved in Korean congregations in one way or another.<sup>33</sup> Considering that in Korea, Buddhists outnumber Christians, the growth of Korean Christian churches is a distinctive phenomenon among Korean immigrants in America. Among Asian-Pacific Americans as well as Korean Americans, there is a prevalent saying accepted as common sense: "If three Chinese get together, they will open a

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<sup>31</sup> Kim, Elaine H. & Eui-Young Yu, ed. *Op. Cit.*, p.353.

<sup>32</sup> "It is estimated that there were thirty Korean-American churches by 1967, 100 by 1970, 500 by 1978, 1,200 by 1982, and more than 3,000 by 1989.....The Southern California region alone demonstrates the rapid growth of Korean-American churches: from eleven in 1965 to 233 in 1980." Kim, Jung Ha. 1997. *Op. Cit.*, p.7

<sup>33</sup> "An estimated 70 to 75 percent of one million Korean Americans living in the United States are gathered into three thousand of their own ethnic churches every Sunday. This also means that there is roughly one ethnic church for every 330 Korean Americans." Pak, Su Yon & Unzo Lee & Jung

restaurant; if three Japanese, they will establish a company. If three Koreans, they will start a church.”

For Korean Americans, church participation has been a way of life independent of their backgrounds. In the research of sociologists Won Moo Hurh and Kwang Jung Kim, they found little difference of church attendance across occupation, length of residency and other variables. According to them, “whether newcomers or old-timers, professionals or manual workers, assimilated or not, the majority of Korean immigrants are pervasively involved in their ethnic churches.”<sup>34</sup> In addition, denominational characteristics are indistinctive among Korean Americans in appealing to those from all backgrounds as well as from those who affiliated with churches for a non-religious motivation.<sup>35</sup>

Because of the significance of Korean American churches in the lives of Korean immigrants, scholars have paid attention to Korean American churches in their studies of Korean communities in America. A few sociological studies on Korean American communities relating to assimilation theories focused on Korean American Protestant churches as key agents for the assimilation of Korean immigrants into American society.<sup>36</sup> Also, there is research showing that the

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Ha Kim & Myung Ji Cho, *Singing the Lord's Song in a New Land: Korean American Practices of Faith*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005. p.1

<sup>34</sup> Hurh, Won Moo and Kwang Chung Kim, “Religious Participation of Korean Immigrants in the United States.” *Journal of the Scientific Studies of Religion*. Vol. 29. No.1 (March, 1990): 19-34. p.28.

<sup>35</sup> Alumkal, Antony W. *Asian American Evangelical Churches: Race, Ethnicity, and Assimilation in the Second Generation*. New York: LFB Scholarly Publishing LLC. 2003. p.37

<sup>36</sup> Kim, Hyun-Chan, ed. *The Korean Diaspora: Historical and Sociological Studies of Korean Immigration and Assimilation in North America*. Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-Clio. 1977; Hurh, Won

Christian identity has contributed to the establishment of the Korean American identity through participating in ethnic churches.<sup>37</sup> In addition to the emphasis on the non-religious motivations, there is research on religious motives for attending churches.<sup>38</sup> No matter what functions the scholars focused on, research has shown that the Christian churches have been inseparable from the Korean immigrant communities in terms of the influences on their social lives and psychological comfort. As a result, Christian churches contributed to limiting the contact of Korean immigrants with other racial or ethnic groups including whites.

Once Koreans arrived in the United States, it was not unusual for church ministers to help new immigrants settle in a new place. Assistance ranged from pick-up service of the new immigrant at the airports to finding a house or apartment.<sup>39</sup> The new immigrants received information for their jobs, businesses,

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Moo, Hei Chu Kim & Kwang Chung Kim, *Assimilation Patterns of Immigrants in the United States: A Case of Korean Immigrants in the Chicago Area*. Washington D.C.: University Press of America. 1979; Hurh, Won Moo & Kwang Chung Kim. *Korean Immigrants in America: A Structural Analysis of Ethnic Confinement and Adhesive Adaptation*. Rutherford, New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson University. 1984; Kim, Ilsoo. *New Urban Immigrants: The Korean Community in New York*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 1981.

Ecklund examined the participation of civic lives of Korean American Christians and the constitution of their civic responsibilities as Americans through their religious activities as evangelical Christians.

Ecklund, Elaine Howard. "Models of Civic Responsibility: Korean Americans in Congregations with Different Ethnic Compositions, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 44:1(2005): 15-28;

Ecklund, Elaine Howard, *Korean American Evangelicals: New Models for Civic Life*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.

<sup>37</sup> Min, Pyong Gap & Rose Kim. ed. *Struggle for Ethnic Identity: Narratives by Asian American Professionals*. Walnut Creek, Calif.: AltaMira Press, 1999; Kim, David Kyuman. *Becoming: Korean Americans, Faith, and Identity—Observations on an Emerging Culture*. Master's Thesis. Boston, MA: Harvard Divinity School. 1993; Chong, Kelly H. "What it Means to Be Christian: The Role of Religion in the Construction of Ethnic Identity and Boundary Among Second-Generation Korean Americans." *Sociology of Religion*. 59. (Fall, 1998): 259-286

<sup>38</sup> Hurh, Won Moo and Kwang Chung Kim, 1990. *Op. Cit.*,

<sup>39</sup> Park, Kyeyoung. 1997. *Op. Cit.*, p.187

and schools for their children through churches. Furthermore, Korean ethnic churches served as a “comfort zone” by “healing the pains of the desocialized people and simultaneously ensuring a sense of personal worth and group identity.”<sup>40</sup> Korean immigrants could stay in familiar environments including languages, food and social fellowships without acculturating into the main society. Therefore, the majority of Korean Americans became Christian after their immigration. According to sociologist Jung-Ha Kim, while only 13 to 15 percent by 1983 and 15 to 18 percent by 1986 of the Korean population were Christians, over 75 percent of the Koreans in the United States were reported to go to Christian churches.<sup>41</sup>

In addition, the participation in Christian religious activities satisfied the desire for Americanization by adopting Protestant values, which they believe constitutes the core values of an American identity. Historically, for Koreans, Christianity has been one of the most important symbols of the West in contrast with the East. Therefore, for Korean American Christians, Protestantism is more than just religion; rather it serves as a vehicle for them to become less foreign in America from their perspectives. Therefore, Korean ethnic Christian churches satisfied their desire to adopt American ways as well as served as a place for the maintenance of their ethnic bonding. As a result, the strong influences of Korean

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<sup>40</sup> Kim, Jung Ha. 1997. *Op. Cit.*, p.14

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

ethnic churches functioned to confine the lives of Korean immigrants into ethnic communities centered on churches and isolated them from American society.

### **III. RELIGIOUS NARRATIVES IN SERMONS: REVEREND KYE-YONG KIM AND REVEREND DONG-SUN LIM.**

I think that God continuously trains His Chosen people through difficult situations and hardships until His people stand firm before God and He leads them to the lives of hope. I believe that God isolated me from the place where I had sinned, called me into the United States and planned to train me through adversity and hardship, so that I might have a true faith as pure as gold. As we all experienced, the hardships and the pains from the lives of the first generation immigrants are beyond imagination and it is not easy to overcome them with our own efforts alone..... However, from now on, I believe that upcoming hardships are evidence that God is with me. In the Bible, Hebrews chapter 12 says that the Lord disciplines those He loves and His discipline produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained. Therefore, we have to be delighted in the trials rather than be afraid of them.<sup>42</sup>

This is an excerpt from the testimony of elder Kiryeo Yangat Youngnak Presbyterian Church of Los Angeles who was in his mid-fifties. Yang was a refugee from the North during the Korean War and immigrated to America in the 1970s. In the same testimony, Yang confessed that while he was working for an oil company in Korea, he sinned by succumbing to Korean drinking culture. Then, Yang testified that God “isolated” him from “the place where I sinned” and “called” him to the United States. Yang understood the hardships in his immigrant life as

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<sup>42</sup> Yang, Kiryeo. “Nagadeun Joeineul (A Sinner Like Me)” *Hanmaeum*. 1988. 9. 11. Vol. 26. p. 32.36-37.

“evidence that God is with me,” and as part of His plan to lead him to a hopeful life. Yang’s testimony interpreted his immigrant life as a disciplinary pilgrimage which hardens his faith in God.

As seen in Yang’s case, the articulation of immigrant life as a pilgrimage is conventional among Korean American Christians. This metaphor provided them religious answers to why they left their comfortable homes and are living in America with the challenges of language barriers, alienation by the dominant society, and downward social mobility. Through pilgrimage narratives, they equated themselves with God’s Chosen people who obeyed God’s calling to the Promised Land. As Yang did, they professed that God called them to America to train them through many trials and tribulations and eventually blessed them to live in the Promised Land. Therefore, a pilgrimage metaphor of Christian life provides the framework for making their immigrant lives more meaningful than remaining in Korea.

Pilgrimage is one of the popular historic Christian symbols. In Christianity, the image of a pilgrim represents a person “who does not absolutize any one place or idea but is always ready to leave the present situation toward a God-promised goal.”<sup>43</sup> This mobility in pilgrimage appealed to Korean immigrants who “tend to consider their present SES(socioeconomic status) as a temporary, and therefore transitional, stage to achieve their own American Dream in the land of

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<sup>43</sup> Lee, Sanghyun. “Pilgrimage and Home in the Wilderness of Marginality: Symbols and Context in Asian American Theology.” Kim, Kwang Chung. R. Stephen Warner. & Ho-Youn Kwon. ed. *Op. Cit.*:55-69. p.61

opportunity.”<sup>44</sup> In addition, a pilgrimage identity makes an insecure and hard immigrant life be seen as God-led training in the wilderness on the journey to the Promised Land.

Rev. Sanghyun Lee, a Korean American theologian at Princeton, suggested the pilgrimage symbol as the central identity of Korean Christians in America. Lee argued that a pilgrimage symbol became their “faith response” to the question, “what is the real meaning of our immigrant existence in America as marginal people?” Lee likened the lives of Korean American Christians to those of Abraham and his descendents as sojourners. Like Abraham, Korean immigrants left their home country and are still in the process of fulfilling God’s promise. According to Lee, Korean Americans’ immigrant lives are made meaningful by appropriating the pilgrimage symbol and becoming “self-conscious” strangers.

It is in this context of having problems of leaving home and really arriving in America that the image of the Abrahamic obedience to God’s call has been invoked in the Asian American church. The challenge is to see the Asian immigrants’ de facto uprootedness as an opportunity to embark on a sacred pilgrimage to some God-promised goal, and therefore to believe that life as strangers and exiles can be meaningful.<sup>45</sup>

We are called to be a pilgrim people. Like Abraham we have been called by God to live in a wilderness “as in a foreign land,” as “strangers and exiles,” not feeling wholly at home where we are, nor being comfortable any more about returning to where we came from. We are not wandering, aimless nomads, however. We are a pilgrim people who are on a sacred journey. We have been freed from the hold of one culture or one society; we have been

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<sup>44</sup> Kim, Jung Ha & Su Yon Pak & Unzo Lee & Myung Ji Cho, *Op. Cit.*, p.9

<sup>45</sup> Lee, Sanghyun. 2001. *Op. Cit.*, p.62

called “to go out” with visions for “a better country” that could be a true homeland, not only for ourselves, but for all humankind.<sup>46</sup>

The robust striving to achieve the American Dream constituted the common ground of Korean immigrants identified as pilgrims who had not finished their journeys. Since religious symbols produce universal and absolute meanings, this pilgrim identity appealed to Korean immigrants across different classes and backgrounds. Based on this belief, Korean American Christians repeatedly confirmed that their decisions were God’s calling, hardships in immigrant lives were evidence of God’s presence in their lives and that in the end, they would have better futures. This religious understanding nurtured Korean Americans’ crude perceptions of their lives, regardless of the complex racial and ethnic environments. They are willing to stick to their goal: successful settlement in America despite the fluctuating social contexts. An Asian American Studies scholar Peter Kwong explained this simple understanding of their immigrant lives as:

They(Asian Americans) tend to reckon race in its crude formation, i.e. an identity along skin color and physical features. We are “Asians”! We look different! Therefore, we are being discriminated against! The remedy is to work harder and to show the Whites that we are just as good if not better!<sup>47</sup>

As Kwong pointed out, Korean immigrants indeed work hard and sacrificed

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<sup>46</sup> Lee, Sang Hyun. “Called To Be Pilgrim: Toward A Theology Within A Korean Immigrant Context” Kim, Byong-Suh & Sang Hyun Lee, ed. *The Korean Immigrant in America*. Montclair, New Jersey: The Association of Christian, 1980: 37-74. p.37.

<sup>47</sup> Kwong, Peter. “Asian American Studies Needs Class Analysis.” Okihiro, Gary Y., Marilyn Alquizola, Dorothy Fujita Rony & K. Scott Wong, ed. *Privileging Positions: The Sites of Asian American Studies*. Pullman, WA: Washington State University Press. 1995. p.76.



everything for their success in America. Korean immigrant churches were places to give not only religious but also personal meanings to their lives. Within the Christian faith communities, they are en route to God's Promised Land and their success is God's will.

Reverend Kye-Yong Kim and Dong-Dun Lim<sup>48</sup> were the most successful religious pastors of Korean immigrant churches in the 1970s and 1980s in the Los Angeles area, as senior pastors of the two largest Korean immigrant churches, Youngnak Presbyterian Church of Los Angeles and Oriental Mission Church respectively. As post-1965 immigrants themselves, their messages emphasize the integration of immigrant lives into Christian spiritual journey.

#### **A. Reverend Kye-Yong Kim**

Reverend Kye-Yong Kim immigrated to America in 1974 and served as the first senior pastor of *Youngnak* Presbyterian Church of Los Angeles<sup>49</sup> until 1988, when the second senior pastor, Rev. Heemin Park, took over the leadership of the church. Rev. Kim served a few more years as a pastor emeritus in the same church

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<sup>48</sup> According to the 2000 system for the Romanization standard of Korean words, his name is Dong-Seon Lim. In addition, in collected essays by Yu, Eui-Young Yu and Elaine H. Kim in *East to America : Korean American Life Stories* (New York: New Press, 1996.), his name was Lim Tong Sun. I will continuously keep Dong-Sun Lim here in this dissertation.

<sup>49</sup> In 1973, thirty nine Korean immigrants founded Youngnak Presbyterian Church of Los Angeles and the church grew to a megachurch with three thousand members. The early members were from the Korean United Presbyterian Church of Los Angeles, one of the early Korean Protestant churches founded in 1907. *Na-Seong Youngnak Gyoheo Isipnywonsa (20-Year History of Youngank Presbyterian Church of Los Angeles.)* Los Angeles: Na-Seong Youngnak Gyoheo Publishing. 1996. p.104.

until he passed away in 1990 at the age of 68. As a senior pastor of one of the biggest and the most influential Korean American churches, Reverend Kye-Yong Kim was commonly known to most Korean American Christians.

His life story embodied Korean national tragedies and the sense of sojourners who had to move to several places. He was born in *Eu-ju, Pyeonganbuk-do*, located in the current territory of North Korea in 1921. In 1940, he graduated from college in *Pyeongyang*, the current Capital city of North Korea and married at the age of nineteen. Then, he became an elementary school teacher and worked for five years. While he was a teacher, he was accused of being against the Japanese government and imprisoned for about 3 years. After he was released from prison, he worked as an evangelist(*Jeondosa*<sup>50</sup> in Korean) in *Eu-ju* until the Korean War broke out in 1950. During the war, he exiled himself to the South alone, leaving his wife and four children behind. Because of the national division followed by the armistice in 1953, he could not bring his family to the South.

Once he came to the South, he entered *Chongsin* Presbyterian Theology School in 1950 and graduated in 1953. Then, he began to work as an evangelist of *Daegu Joongang* Church, in *Daegu*, a city in central South Korea in 1950. After he was ordained as pastor in 1954, he served as the senior pastor of the same church for the next seven years. In 1961, he moved to Seoul and served as the senior pastor of Seoul Moohak Church for three years. Then, he went to Denver Baptist Seminary in America and studied education. After he finished his study, the

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<sup>50</sup> In Korean churches, *Jeondosa* refers to people who are not officially ordained as pastors.

missionary board dispatched him to Brazil in 1967 where he stayed for five years before moving to Los Angeles as the senior pastor of Youngnak Presbyterian Church in 1974.

When Kim came to LA in 1974, Youngnak Presbyterian Church of Los Angeles was a small congregation with about a hundred members. After Kim was appointed as senior pastor at Youngnak, the church subsequently grew into one of the biggest Korean American Protestant churches with 3,500 members including children and students by the time he retired in 1988.<sup>51</sup> Kim passed away from a sudden heart attack while he was visiting North Korea in 1990. Kim visited his hometown located in North Korea in order to meet his wife and one surviving son he had left behind when he fled to the South.

After he passed away, Youngnak published his lifetime sermons, biographical essays and the collections of the testimonies of Youngnak members remembering Rev. Kim. In addition, in 2001, Youngnak dedicated the new church building to him and named it after him to commemorate his contribution to the church as well as the Korean immigrant communities.

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<sup>51</sup> Kim, Kye-Yong. *Kye-Yong Kim Lifetime Sermon Collections. Vol. 6*. La Mirada, CA: Gwangya Press. 1998. p.420-421; *Na-Seong Youngnak Gyoheo Isipnywonsa (20-Year History of Youngank Presbyterian Church of Los Angeles.)* Los Angeles: Na-Seong Youngnak Gyoheo Publishing. 1996. p.207.

## B. Sermons of Rev. Kye-Yong Kim.

Dear father, we thank you so much.

Here today, we thank you for acknowledging your plan. In the Bible, you called Abraham from Haran and sent him to Canaan. However, you thought, Jacob's seventy family members were too weak in number to overcome hardships and threats from the neighbors in Canaan and to prosper into a big nation. So you took them to the region of Goshen, Egypt, the most powerful nation of that time, and isolated them from Egyptians to prevent the assimilation into sinful Egyptian ways and to enable them to grow in number. Then, we learned that your plan was to call them again to Canaan and select them as Your Chosen people who is appointed as Your missionaries to deliver the gospel to the whole world. Likewise, we are selected as Your Chosen people and came to America and received precious missions to send our missionaries and deliver the gospel to the world by building churches and getting trained here, in America. Then, we pray that You let us have faith in returning to holy Canaan in the end, as Jacob worshiped leaning on the top of his staff when he died. (Hebrews 11:21. By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph's sons, and worshiped as he leaned on the top of his staff.)<sup>52</sup>

This is Kim's prayer after a series of sermons on Genesis. In this prayer, Rev. Kim directly applied the Biblical stories of Abraham and his descendents in the Book of Genesis to the cases of Korean immigrants and established self-images of Koreans as a God-Chosen people who were carrying on God's special calling and taking on a "sacred pilgrimage" toward Canaan.

The book of Genesis in the Bible is based on the immigrant stories of Abraham and his descendents. Terah, Abraham's father, set out from Ur of the Chaldeans (in modern Iraq), the land of his birth, to go to Canaan with his family

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<sup>52</sup> Rev. Kye-Yong Kim. "Genesis 46:1-47:31" *Changsegi Ganghae (Lecture on The Genesis)*. Seoul: Yangseogak. 1989:521-532. p.531-532.

including Abraham. Then, when they reached Haran (Syria), Terah settled there and lived 205 years until he died. However, Abraham left Haran and finally entered Canaan, God's Promised Land. Abraham's descendents lived there until Jacob, Abraham's grandson, immigrated to Egypt. Then, Jacob's descendents stayed in Egypt for 400 years until they fled under the leadership of Moses. Exodus is an immigrant journey of Jacob's descendents back to Canaan. These Biblical figures in the book of Genesis took on a 'sacred pilgrimage' and pursued the entrance to Canaan, God's Promised Land.

The immigrant stories of Abraham's family in the Book of Genesis were Rev. Kim's favorite sermon subjects. Kim preached that today's Korean American Christians should receive lessons and project visions for the future from these Biblical messages.

In one of the series of Kim's sermons based on Genesis chapter 11, Kim paid attention to Terah, Abraham's father. In the Bible, Terah was a person who took off from his birth place toward Canaan with young Abraham and his families. But he stopped in Haran in the middle and died there.

I will read from verse 27. "This is the account of Terah. Terah became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran. And Haran became the father of Lot. (27) While his father Terah was still alive, Haran died in Ur of the Chaldeans, in the land of his birth. (28) Abram and Nahor both married. The name of Abram's wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor's wife was Milcah; she was the daughter of Haran, the father of both Milcah and Iscah. (29) Now Sarai was barren; she had no children. (30) Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of his son Abram, and together they set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan. But when they came to Haran, they settled there. (31) Terah lived 205 years, and he died in Haran. (32)

In these verses, it was Terah who caught my attention. Who was Terah? He was Abram's father and rich in Ur of the Chaldeans. However, according to Joshua Chapter 24<sup>53</sup>, Terah worshiped other gods when he lived in Ur of the Chaldeans. Based on that scriptures, I think Terah worshiped idols. However, God seemed to select Abraham in his early days.<sup>54</sup>

By the way, what Terah did was to leave his hometown, Ur of the Chaldeans, with his beloved wife, sons, daughters-in-law and the family of Lot, the son of his third son. Then, he attempted to immigrate to Canaan, but he stopped at Haran and died after he stayed for a while. Haran is 800 kilometers, which is 2,000 *ri*<sup>55</sup> as far as from Ur of the Chaldeans. Therefore, Terah walked 2,000 *ri* for the purpose of entering Canaan but stopped in Haran.

Then, what made Terah move from his homeland, Ur of the Chaldeans, to a foreign land where there were no relatives and no acquaintances? What made him eagerly walk and walk thousands of miles with all his families to Canaan, his final destination, although he died in Haran on the way. In general, there are various reasons why people decide to leave their homes. One of them would be for economic purposes, wishing to live more prosperously. However, it was not an economic purpose for which Terah, Abraham's father, left his hometown. They were already wealthy in their homelands. They didn't have to leave all their property behind and immigrate to Canaan for wealthier lives. It is doubtless that they didn't leave for Canaan for economic purposes.<sup>56</sup>

I have done much research to figure out the real reason why they left for Canaan. And I found that Abraham persuaded Terah to leave, saying that they should find the place where they could worship the Lord without being distracted by other idols prevalent in Chaldeans. Their motives of immigration were to find a place for worshiping God. Then, although Terah died in the middle of immigration, Abraham, his first son, finally reached

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<sup>53</sup> Joshua 24:1-2. "Then Joshua assembled all the tribes of Israel at Shechem. He summoned the elders, leaders, judges and officials of Israel, and they presented themselves before God. Joshua said to all the people, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'Long ago your forefathers, including Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the River and worshiped other gods.'"

<sup>54</sup> Rev. Kye-Yong Kim. 1989. "Genesis 11:10-32" *Op. Cit.*:165-175. p.169-170

<sup>55</sup> *Ri* is a Korean old unit measuring distance. 1 *Ri* = 0.5 km

<sup>56</sup> Rev. Kye-Yong Kim. "Genesis 11:10-32" *Changsegi Ganghae (Lecture on The Genesis)*. Seoul: Yangseogak. 1989:165-175. p.171

Canaan according to chapter twelve in the book of Genesis. Then we can clearly see how much Abraham and his descendents were blessed by God there.<sup>57</sup>

Rev. Kim focused on the question, “what made Terah move from his homeland” to a “foreign land where there were no relatives and no acquaintances,” which was the motivation of their immigration. Kim’s narrative presents his assurance that Terah did not leave his hometown for “wealthier lives” and Kim’s confidence was based on the fact that Terah was not poor in his hometown.

According to Kim’s interpretation, the “real” reason why Terah left his hometown was for “worshiping the Lord without being distracted by other idols,” because idol worship was prevalent in Ur of the Chaldeans at that time. His emphasis on Terah’s non-economic motivation reveals Kim’s criticism of Korean Americans who seemed to be obsessed with material success. However, Kim’s conclusion still promises material success to Korean American Christians by “clearly” underscoring how much God blessed Abraham and his descendents because of Terah’s obedience to God’s calling. In the following quote, Kim repeated the importance of the transformation of their immigrant motives from diverse secular reasons to Terah’s for bringing “continuous blessing from God on their families and their descendents.”

Then, what made you decide to immigrate to America? What was your main purpose for immigration? You need to think about that. Some of you might have failed in your business and left for the purpose of making big fortunes

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<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p.171-172.

here. Some of you might have come to America for escaping in advance in case Kim Il-sung in North Korea invaded South Korea. Some of you came here with grand dreams, seeking better opportunities in a bigger country because Korea is so small that many opportunities are restricted. Some of you might have come here for better lives for educating your children even if you have to sacrifice your lives here in foreign lands. Some of you just decided to come here only because you got the chances to immigrate by being invited by your families who had gotten American citizenship. As I said, there are diverse reasons for your immigration to America. However, it is the motives of Abraham and Terah's immigration that you have to think about in this evening. You should remember that it was not for economic success or threat of outbreak of war that they left their prosperous homeland, the Ur of the Chaldeans. The purpose was only in their hope to find a place where there were no idols so that they could worship God more sincerely and live by His will. Their purpose for immigration brought continuous blessing from God on their families and their descendents.<sup>58</sup>

Kim consolidated the exemplified "diverse reasons" for Korean immigration into the concept of their spiritual journeys inspired by God's calling. In Kim's sermon, their American dreams are transformed to God's dream within the context of pilgrimage narratives. Pilgrim identities of Korean American Christians bring "transformation from material life to spiritual life, from earthly to godly life, and from secular pilgrimage to sacred pilgrimage."<sup>59</sup> According to Kim, this transformation is significant because their spiritual journeys would bring success to the immigrants themselves and their descendents because one of the most important factors in Abraham's immigration was the promise of God's material blessings on his descendents as well.

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p.172.

<sup>59</sup> Kim, Tae Kyung. *Op. Cit.*, p.22.



Kim's following comparison between America and Mexico in the same sermon supplemented Kim's interpretation of material prosperity as God's blessing on those who followed in Terah's footsteps. Kim argued that the wealth of the United States is the evidence of God's blessings because of the Puritans, in comparison with the poverty of Mexico relative to America.

Mexico is a country which is composed of those who immigrated from Europe for finding treasures in gold mines. In Brazil, there were many people who came to harvest rubber in the Amazon river area. Those who wanted to dig more gold brought a large number of slaves from Africa. However, what kinds of people immigrated to North America? As you well know, it was the Puritans who had escaped from England for religious freedom and moved to the Netherlands. And 102 Puritans finally decided to immigrate to North America on the *Mayflower*. Then can you see the different living conditions between descendents of those who came here for gold and rubber and the Puritans for religious purposes?

What makes thousands of Mexicans cross the American-Mexican border, risking their lives as if we had crossed the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel in Korea? We cannot ignore the historical fact that those who left their home for gold are eager to live in the land of those who came for their faith in God.<sup>60</sup>

Kim's above interpretation of the current disparate material conditions of the two countries is warning the congregation by attributing the materially inferior conditions of Mexico to the secular motivations for their ancestors' immigration. On the contrary, according to Kim, the materially better condition of the United States was evidence of God's blessings on the descendents of American Puritans who he argued came to America for purely religious reasons.

His strategy to illustrate the existing countries as evidence of success and wealth gave the congregation more concrete sense about Kim's warning. In

addition, his personal background of staying in Brazil before coming to the U.S. further strengthened Kim's illustration of "the historical fact." However, ironically, Kim's illustration is ignoring "the historical fact." First of all, the Europeans who came to Brazil were primarily Portuguese while those who came to Mexico were Spanish. In addition, people who came to South America included not only those who sought gold but also Catholic missionaries who crossed the Atlantic for religious purposes. Furthermore, the Puritans were not the only groups who came to North America. In early American history, the settlers in the Virginia colony came to North America for gaining wealth.

However, through this ahistorical simplification between South Americans and North Americans, Kim confirmed that a key element in pilgrimage lives of God's Chosen people is His promise to bless them for generations. This idea appealed to Korean immigrants who decided to leave their homes and had sacrificed themselves for their children. This pilgrimage symbol provided a framework for Korean American faith communities to make sense of the difficulties in their immigrant lives as a part of their sacred journey which would eventually bring material success.

The superior economic status of the Korean immigrants in America in comparison with those in other countries also contributed to the distinct identity of Korean Americans. This exceptional situation of Korean Americans became the basis of the collective self-identity as a God's chosen people among Korean

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<sup>60</sup> Rev. Kye-Yong Kim. "Genesis 11:10-32" *Op. Cit.*, p.172-173.

American Christians as well. The following is Kim's testimony after he visited China on April, 13 of 1982. Kim compared Koreans in China and those in the United States.

When I went to China in 1982, I thought, 'Ah, we should teach the gospel here' Innumerable people in Shanghai should know Jesus some day. I believed that these more than one hundred million people should have a chance to hear the Gospel. Especially, I felt in that way when I thought of Korean immigrants in China. If I read their minds, they must be eager to have faith in Jesus, but they seem to hesitate because of social restrictions. So, I compared Korean immigrants in America with those in China. I felt that God gave Korean Americans a mission to evangelize other places through our immigration to America.

So, I always said this to Korean Americans. Though the Koreans in China started immigrating to China earlier than we, they just ate rice mixed with other crops that was inferior to pure rice and could not eat enough. Even though they are living well in comparison with other communist countries, we Korean Americans, even the poorest, are much wealthier than the people in China.<sup>61</sup>

Do you think that God sent us here and enabled us to eat beef and butter<sup>62</sup> because He loved us more? Why do you think God made this discrimination even if they in China survive on the distribution of rations? We should know that God sent us to this land to give us the mission as God's Chosen people. This mission for us is that we should earn money or educate the missionaries and evangelize the people in other countries.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Park, Hi-Seong.. *Kye-Yong Kim Lifetime Sermon Collections*. Vol. 6, La Mirada, CA: Gwangya Press. 1998. (Korean) p.478.

<sup>62</sup> The Korean expression meaning the food for the rich as steak and lobster in America.

<sup>63</sup> Park, Hi-Seong.. *Kye-Yong Kim Lifetime Sermon Collections*. Vol. 6, La Mirada, CA: Gwangya Press. 1998. (Korean) p.480.

Kim said, “even the poorest are much wealthier than the people in China.”

According to Kim, the immigration to America has special meanings because of the wealth of America.

However, even if America is a relatively rich country, the lives of Korean immigrants were not always good as they wanted other people to perceive them.

Then, in Kim’s sermon, Kim interpreted this paradoxical situations by comparing their hard immigrant lives to the place of “Haran.”

I think we are people like Terah. As Terah left Ur of the Chaldeans for Canaan and settled in Haran, we left Korea, an old place, and came up to Haran today, dreaming of Canaan in the future.

I know you decided to leave because you thought the lives in America would be better for your children. However, we are not in Canaan yet. We are in Haran. We are having all kinds of difficulty, anxiety and despair in our immigrant lives. We are severely struggling in the beginning of our immigrant lives. We left Korean cultures and traditions behind, but we could not embody American cultures and traits. We are still sojourners. We are in Haran, the middle between Korea and America. Terah died in a place far from Canaan. However, I think Terah’s death does not mean failure. He could not accomplish much in his life. On the contrary, Terah made his families go on a painful journey. However, Terah showed his families the direction toward Canaan, the Promised Land. That was enough. Through Terah, the journey toward Canaan started.<sup>64</sup>

Everyone came to America to find Canaan, the land of happiness. We studied, learned skills, opened businesses and made every effort to find Canaan. Nevertheless, we have not reached Canaan yet. Why are we still in the wilderness? Why have we not entered Canaan, suffering in wilderness

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<sup>64</sup> Kim, Kye-Yong. “Eojewa Naeil Sai (Between Yesterday and Tomorrow)” Kim, Kye-Yong. *Kye-Yong Kim Lifetime Sermon Collections*. Vol. 4, La Mirada, CA: Gwangya Press. 1998. (Korean) : 470-478. p.475

from poverty, poisonous snakes, thorns and thirst? That's because we did not cross the river.<sup>65</sup>

According to Kim's metaphors, Korean immigrants left Korea, Ur of the Chaldeans, to settle in Canaan, America. They are "sojourners" in "Haran" or "wilderness" which symbolized "the middle between Korea and America."

Kim's interpretation adopts a linear assimilation model of immigrants. An assimilation theory is one of the widely accepted and applied models for immigrants to be Americanized. Sociologist, Robert E. Part and the Chicago school scholars developed the key concept of assimilation theory in the early 1920s. They proposed assimilation cycle theory that the immigrant assimilation can be completed through the cycle of contact, competition, accommodation and assimilation. Milton Gordon was another representative scholar to develop the assimilation patterns of immigrants. Gordon conceptualized assimilation by categorizing its different levels from acculturation to structural assimilation, analyzing how the three variables, race, religion and national origins, influence these levels of assimilation of immigrants in America.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Kim, Ky-Yong. "Sae Ttagneul Hyanghae Geonneogara (Cross over the River toward the New Land.)" Kim, Kye-Yong. *Kye-Yong Kim Lifetime Sermon Collections. Vol.3*. La Mirada, CA: Gwangya Press. 1998.:227-234.p.229. (1989.1.1)

<sup>66</sup> Gordon, Milton. *Assimilation in American Life*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press. 1964.,  
Further research on reevaluation of an assimilation theory, see, Alba, Richard, "Rethinking Assimilation Theory for a New Era of Immigration," *International Migration Review*, Vol 31. Nov. 4 (1997 Winter):826-874; Kazal, Russell A., "Revisiting Assimilation: The Rise, Fall, and Reappraisal of a concept in American Ethnic History," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 100, Issue 2(April, 1995): 437-471. Also, there are some scholars supplementing assimilation theory to get over its limitation. A "segmented assimilation" theory is one of the examples. A segmented assimilation argues that people experience different assimilation processes and levels according to

The premise of the assimilation model is that immigrants will be eventually Americanized as generations pass and that Americanization implied Anglo-conformity. In addition, Kim's adoption of the assimilation concept implied that Americanization means the process of settling in America by achieving material success rather than by culturally assimilating to American ways of life. Therefore, identities as pilgrims over generations consoled them in their uprooted situations and the current hard immigrant lives based on their reality-escaping attitudes. Within Kim's interpretation, instead of being marginal people who stand between the two antagonistic societies, they share the new identity as God's chosen people who obeyed God's calling and are still fulfilling God's will. The God's chosen people narrative sanctified the assimilation process of immigrants and transformed their transnational experiences into a spiritual dimension. This spiritual journey decontextualizes their particular Korean racial and ethnic backgrounds in American society. In this process, Korean immigrants maintain the identity of Koreans in America within the context of God's plan for Koreans.

We have to answer our calling of chosen people as immigrant churches. Long ago, the calling of the Israelites as chosen people was to expand the Lord's words to Canaan and then to the whole world. What do you think brings us here to America, the land of Canaan? The Lord gave us a job as chosen people. We have to answer our calling.<sup>67</sup>

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factors such as class, age, generation within the same race and ethnic groups. See, Zhou, Min. "Segmented Assimilation: Issues, Controversies, and Recent Research on the New Second Generation." *International Migration Review*. Vol. 31. Nov.4. (1997 Winter): p.975-1008.

<sup>67</sup> Kim, Kye -Yong. "Woori Gyoheo ui Eojewa Oneulgwa Naeil (Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow of our church)" Kim, Kye-Yong. *Kye-Yong Kim Lifetime Sermon Collections*. Vol. 3, La Mirada, CA: Gwangya Press. 1998. (Korean) : 146-153, p.153.

In sum, through the pilgrimage narratives, Rev. Kim adds the concept of God's chosen people in the group identity as Korean immigrants in America. Reverend Dong-Sun Lim bolstered the concept of Biblical sojourners as models for Korean Americans through his sermons.

### C. Reverend Dong-Sun Lim

Rev. Dong-Sun Lim is a founder and former senior pastor of the Oriental Mission Church in Los Angeles, California, which is located in the Los Angeles Korea town. The Oriental Mission Church is a Korean American church with more than three thousand members. His personal background represents the first generation of post-1965 Korean immigrant in Los Angeles. He not only delivered many influential sermons but also wrote his autobiography<sup>68</sup> and Qumran book publishing company in Seoul collected his sermons and published several books.<sup>69</sup> He founded the World Mission Theological Seminary in Los Angeles in 1989 for educating Korean American pastors.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> He wrote several autobiographical testimonies during his services as a pastor for forty years. These include, Lim, Dong-Sun. *Ji'go'chon'eun Na'eu Mok'jang'ee'da* (*The Glove is My Pasture.*) Seoul, Korea: Qumran Book, 2004; Lim, Songsun. *Tam'eun Heul'rey'do Ki'pem'eun Sam'mul'cheo'rum* (*Sweating but With Great Joy!*) Seoul, Korea: Qumran Book. 1999.

<sup>69</sup> Lim, Dong-Sun. *Whoe'go'wah Jun'mang: Jul'gi' Sul'kyo'jib.* (*Recollection and Prospects: The Sermon Collections in Special ceremony*). Seoul, Korea: Qumran Book. 2000.

<sup>70</sup> See [www.wmu.edu](http://www.wmu.edu) for further information.

Rev. Lim is a post-1965 immigrant who came to America pursue better educational opportunities. Lim was born in Kyeong-Gi province close to Seoul in 1923 to a family who believed in Buddhism and Confucianism. He became a Christian at the age of twenty three, influenced by his brother, who served as a minister for Methodist churches near Seoul and was killed during the Korean War by the communists at thirty-one years of age.<sup>71</sup> In 1946, Rev. Lim was imprisoned for participating in anti-communist movements in the communist territory under Soviet Union leadership after the national division and almost sentenced to death. However, fortunately Lim was released with the help with the people who he had known.<sup>72</sup>

After he was released from prison, Lim worked for the Korean Air Force for eleven years. After he resigned from the Air Force, he started his study at Seoul

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<sup>71</sup> Shin, Seonmook. *Life-Changing Lessons from Two Korean Christian Leaders*. Pasadena, California: Fuller Theology Seminary. Doctorate Dissertation. 1995. p.72

<sup>72</sup> This is the story how Rev. Lim could be miraculously released.  
 “I was sent away on a truck. I was curious about where I was being sent. I was going to Pyeongyang (the capital city of North Korea). I was sent to the basement of the headquarter of the Communists. Several hours later, someone took me to the fourth floor and turned me over to the secretary. Next, I was standing before their leader, Il-Sung (who became the president of North Korea and died in 1994). However, fortunately, there was Sunghwan Park, whom I knew. He was a pilot in the Manchuria Air Force. He was a follower of Yeo Unyoung (another important Communist leader in early history of North Korea). He defended me to Il-Sung Kim. ‘Dong-Sun Lim is not a spy from the South. He used to work for the Communists in the South. This is a good young man who loves his country. I will guarantee this man.’  
 Il-Sung Kim said, ‘O.K. Welcome. You can work for the Communists in the center of the Pyeongyang people’s council.’ I answered to him, ‘It is important to work here for the people. However, for the time being, I would like to study first under professor Namhoon Bae in Seoul National University.’ I asked him to send me to Seoul. I said, ‘I will return and work for the people.’ He accepted my offer. He gave me a note signed by his secretary. I could go into the South with the note. And then just as soon as I came into the South, I tore up the note and said to myself. ‘I survived.’ And then I went to Seoul to my brother who was studying at Seoul Theological Seminary.”  
 Lim, Dong-Sun. 2004. *Op. Cit.*, p.19-20.



Seminary School in Seoul. While he was studying, Lim received three job offers; an evangelist at the Korean Evangelical Church, a senior pastor at one of the biggest churches in Seoul and a bishop of a little congregation. All these three guaranteed him financial security and social prestige. However, he decided to come to America for further study at Seminary at the age of forty three.

Lim came to Los Angeles in May, 1965. He wanted to study at Azubery Theology Seminary in Kentucky, but he had to find a job for making a living as well. With the help of another pastor in Los Angeles, Lim found a job of shipping and receiving in a printing company, Parker and Son. Lim worked hard to fulfill his dream in America.

I was well-disciplined physically, mentally, and spiritually. I worked so hard, cleaned all the machines with oil like I used to clean my gun in the Air Force. The supervisor seemed to be impressed with my work. He hired me in a week. The starting pay was \$1.65 per hour. The company paid workers from the starting pay, and in two months, they paid me fifty cents more and in three months, they paid me one dollar more. Later I received five dollars an hour. It was the same as the pay of the worker who had worked there twenty years<sup>73</sup>.

After five years of studying and working, he became a minister and founded the Oriental Mission Church in Los Angeles in 1970.<sup>74</sup> He served this church for twenty years as the senior pastor and for five years as a pastor emeritus.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Lim, Songsun. *Tam'eun Heul'rey'do Ki'peum'eun Sam'mul'cheo'rum* (Sweating but With Great Joy!) Seoul, Korea: Qumran Book. 1999. p.119.

<sup>74</sup> "Thirty believers sharing evangelical Christian faith gathered on July 26, 1970, at the address 926 South Irolo Street, Los Angeles (Rev. Lim Dongsun's house) and founded the church promising their efforts for missions, education, and dedication to the society." in Kang, Choon Min Joshua. *Dongyang Sungkyo Kyoheo Samsiphyun Sa* (30-Year History of The Oriental Mission Church). 2002. p.92.

His personal background exemplifies the experiences of Korean immigrants in America. He left everything behind in Korea and started a new life dreaming of better educational opportunities, as Lim testified:

I had to forget all the past. I was pastor. I was a chief in the Air Force. I graduated from college and seminary. I was a famous evangelist. I forgot everything I used to be and started a new life from the bottom.<sup>76</sup>

#### **D. Sermons of Rev. Dong-Sun Lim**

Like Rev. Kye-Yong Kim, Lim's sermons are based on the history of the Jewish in the Old Testament in the Bible such as Exodus for interpreting the immigrant experiences of Korean Americans. The symbols in Exodus such as God's chosen people, deliverance, and exodus toward the Promised Land, have a more powerful impact on interpreting and understanding the experiences of a group in a flexible way within the different contexts. In general, the story of Exodus resonated with the national history of those who have experiences of both hardship and freedom as well as immigration from one place to another. Lim implored the congregation to make sense of their transnational experiences within the framework of Exodus.

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<sup>75</sup> Shin, Seonmook. *Op. Cit.*, p.6

<sup>76</sup> Lim, Song-Sun. 1999. *Op. Cit.*, p.119.

In America, Exodus narratives were popularly taken by African Americans. Historian Eddie S. Glaude, Jr. analyzed how Exodus in the Bible influenced the imagination of African Americans for their construction of racial identity in the early nineteenth century, just before the Civil War.<sup>77</sup> According to his analysis, a classical storyline of Exodus provides the model of explaining the special history and experience of slavery of African Americans. In addition to African American cases, there is some literature on the examination of the use of Exodus by other groups including Mormons, Native Americans and Filipinos.<sup>78</sup> For example, historian of religion Fernandez Eleazar examined how Filipino Americans made sense of their experiences based on Exodus. What is interesting in Fernandez's study is that Filipino American narratives interpreted their immigration to America as the movement into Egypt rather than from Egypt based on the history of the colonization by the U.S.<sup>79</sup>

In the same sense, Lim used Korean history as a source for making an analogy between Korean American experiences and Exodus in the Bible.

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<sup>77</sup> Glaude, Eddie S., Jr. *Exodus! : Religion, Race, and Nation in Early Nineteenth-Century Black America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 2000; Glaude, Eddie S., Jr. "Myth and African American Self-Identity." Prentiss, Craig R. ed. *Religion and the Creation of Race and Ethnicity: An Introduction*. New York: New York University Press. 2003. p. 28-42

<sup>78</sup> Newton, John, "Analysis of Programmatic Texts of Exodus Movements," Israel, Bas van & Anton Weiler., ed. translated by Marcus Lefebure. *Exodus- A Lasting Paradigm*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark Ltd. 1987; Cherry, Conrad ed., *God's New Israel: Religious Interpretations of American Destiny*. Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press. 1998; Sugirtharajah, R.S. ed. *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1995; Fernandez, Eleazar S. "Exodus-toward- Egypt.: Filipino-American's Struggle to Realize the Promised Land in America." Fernandez, Eleazar S. & Fernando F. Segovia. Ed. *A Dream Unfinished: Theological Reflections on American from the Margins*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books. 2001. p. 167-184.

<sup>79</sup> Fernandez, Eleazar S. *Op. Cit.*

According to Lim, for Korean immigrants, exodus has meant release from their homeland, a land of colonization, war, national division, military authoritarian political regimes, limited social mobility, and class polarization caused by rapid industrialization, and an exodus toward the United States, a land of wealth and opportunity. An image of the U.S. as a liberator of Korea based a century of Korea-American relationship has legitimized this connotation of release and exodus.

While Rev. Kim made allegorical interpretations of Korean immigration to Terah and Abraham's voluntary decision to leave their homes as their answers to God's calling, Rev. Lim emphasized that God liberated His Chosen people. In the narrative of Exodus, God led Korean immigrants into the Promised Land which they believe is America. This analogy enables Korean immigrants to understand their transnational movement as linear assimilation from homeland to America which they believe is the better place. Therefore, they obtain their distinct identities without denying their Korean ethnic backgrounds. Even if they place emphasis upon Korean ethnic backgrounds, they try to establish their identities distinguishing themselves from Koreans in Korea.

In Lim's sermons, my question is about how the symbols of Exodus are used to express Korean Americans' perspectives toward their immigrant lives and their goals. In the process of articulating the Biblical story, Rev. Lim reveals the views of the diasporan situations of Korean immigrants. The Exodus story drew both boundaries and connections between their homeland and the new country

based on the same destiny as God's Chosen people. As a result, it establishes their group solidarity as Koreans in America.

Lim gave a message with the theme of Exodus in his sermon, *Thanksgiving in the Feast of Tabernacles* (1991).<sup>80</sup> Lim took the text from Leviticus, chapter 23. The Feast of Tabernacles is a week-long autumn harvest festival of the Jewish people. It was the final and most important holiday of the year and began on the fifteenth of Tishri.<sup>81</sup> *Tabernacles* refers to the temporary dwelling that God commanded Jews to live in for seven days during this holiday. This holiday commemorates the time when the Jews lived in tents in the wilderness during the forty-years that the Israelites were wandering in the desert between liberation from Egypt and entrance into Canaan.<sup>82</sup> In this sermon, Lim made an allegorical connection between Jews and the Korean Americans. Exodus provides a good metaphorical framework for Koreans, satisfying their native Korean identity and their immigration experiences.

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<sup>80</sup> The Feast of Tabernacles is a week-long autumn harvest festival of the Jewish people. It was a final and most important holiday of the year and began on the fifteenth of Tishri. Tishri is Israel's seventh month. It's roughly September or October in solar calendar. In Leviticus 23:34, the Bible indicates the date of the holiday and period, "Say to the Israelites: 'On the fifteenth day of the seventh month the LORD's Feast of Tabernacles begins, and it lasts for seven days.'" *Tabernacles* refers to the temporary dwelling that Jews are commanded to live in for seven days during this holiday. This holiday commemorates the time when the Jews lived in tents in the wilderness during the forty-year that the Israelites were wandering in the desert between liberation from Egypt and entrance into the Canaan. Lim delivered the sermon about what the Jews thanked God for in the Tabernacles during this holiday.

<sup>81</sup> Tishri is Israel's seventh month. It's roughly September or October in solar calendar. In Leviticus 23:34, the Bible indicates the date of the holiday and period, "Say to the Israelites: 'On the fifteenth day of the seventh month the LORD's Feast of Tabernacles begins, and it lasts for seven days.'"

<sup>82</sup> In the Bible, Leviticus chapter 23, verse 42-43 says "Live in booths for seven days: All native-born Israelites are to live in booths. So your descendants will know that I had the Israelites live in booths when I brought them out of Egypt. I am the LORD your God." "

Lim went back to the colonization history of Korea as a common historical source to Korean immigrants. In modern history of Korea, one of the greatest historical tragedies was the colonization by Japan. Under Japanese occupation, Koreans' lives were miserable, almost like slaves because Japan exploited everything in Korea, politically, economically and culturally. The memory and story of colonization by Japan provided Korean Christians a source to create an analogy with Egypt's oppression of Israel.

In this sermon, Lim used Korean history of colonization as an analogy to the Egyptian oppression of the Israelites. In his analogy, the Japanese occupation period is analogous to the slavery time of the Israelites under Egypt and the independence from Japan is analogous to the release from Egyptian oppression. Then, this exodus interpretation of the freedom of Korea from Japan leads to the interpretation of immigration to America, which he considers is a New Canaan.

In Lim's sermon, he specified the afflictions of the Israelites under Egypt in three ways: "Long ago, the Israelites had been enslaved by Egypt for 430 years. They were treated like animals and suffered under forced labor. Later, the Israelites had three afflictions; racial, economic and religious ones."<sup>83</sup> Then, Lim likened the experiences of the Israelites in the Bible to those of Koreans under Japanese occupation. Lim described the afflictions of the Japanese on Koreans in three ways.

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<sup>83</sup> Lim, Dong-Sun. "Thanksgiving in the Feast of Tabernacles" (1991) in Lim, Dong-Sun. *Whoe'go'wah Jun'mang: Jul'gi' Sul'kyo'jib. (Recollection and Prospects: The Sermon Collections in Special ceremony)*. Seoul, Korea: Qumran Book. 2000:329-341. p.330.

During the Japanese colonization period, the Koreans had the same afflictions as the Israelites. The Japanese killed Korean patriots and Christians. In Manchuria, they killed many Koreans for their medical experiments. Also, how much did they exploit us economically? They took high-quality rice for military purposes in the name of the Oriental Development Company<sup>84</sup> exploited iron, silver, and gold from mines in Korea and they provided for Koreans far less food than the Japanese because the Koreans were considered inferior to the Japanese. In addition, they enforced idol worship by compelling us to bow to the Japanese shrines and illegalized the Christian churches. They dared to put the Christian leaders in jail and killed them.<sup>85</sup>

Considering that the Japanese occupation period represents the slavery time of the Israelites under Egypt, the independence of Korea from Japan is analogous to the exodus from Egypt of the Israelites. Lim's parallel between the freedom of the Israelites with that of the Koreans traces the identity of Korean immigrants back to Korean national historical incidents. Lim's Exodus narrative interprets the Korean history in religious term and provide the image of God's Chosen people for Koreans. In the same sermon, Lim continued to parallel the experiences of the two people, the Israelites and the Koreans.

When the Israelites had been suffering under slavery in Egypt for 430 years, God emancipated them to be an independent race through Moses. Additionally, God wanted them to remember their past and not to forget their history of slavery when they finally settled down in Canaan after all their wilderness experiences. God wanted the same for us. Suppose God had not

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<sup>84</sup> In the end of nineteenth century, the foreign countries forced Korea to accept the modern systems. When Japan started intervening in Korean politics and economics, Korea was still a rural society. At that time, Japan founded the Oriental Development Company as an agent to exploit Korean resources. Japan forced Korean to adopt a new economic system. Japan easily took the ownership of the land and products under the new system to which Korean were not accustomed.

<sup>85</sup> Lim, Dong-Sun Lim. "Thanksgiving in the Feast of Tabernacle" (1991) *Op. Cit.*, p.331.

freed us from Japan on Aug. 15, 1945, what would we be like now? Could our ancestors have survived? If they had all been killed, what would have happened to their descendents? Do you think it would have been possible for us Koreans to immigrate to America? We would not have been able to immigrate to America. Therefore, we have to give immense thanks to God who has protected our race until now.<sup>86</sup>

Saying “God wanted the same for us.” between the two cases, Lim paralleled the independence of the Koreans and the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt. In “the same to us” above in Lim’s sermon, “the same” indicates that “God wanted them to remember their past and not to forget their history of slavery when they finally settled down in Canaan after all their wilderness experiences.” Based on Lim’s analogy, God freed Koreans from the bondage of the Japanese occupation, and Koreans came from the hard lives in Korea through the wilderness to America. Lim clarified this point more directly in the end of his sermon by defining twentieth century Canaan as America:

Where is the land of milk and honey? I believe it is the present America. Therefore, just be thankful for living in this prosperous land. Even if people say America is having economic depression these days, we can see there are many harvested fruits in the farms thanks to God’s blessing. I sincerely tell you to appreciate everything you have. Then, as is says in Psalms, I pray that you think about what we can do to repay all these blessings from God and put it into action.<sup>87</sup>

Since the beginning of the contact with America, “this prosperous land” with rich natural resources has been a dominant images of America because Korea

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<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p.331-332

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p.341.



has small territory and limited natural resources. For instance, Hangi Choi (1803-1877), a prestigious scholar of Joseon, wrote a work on the human geography of the world, including a detailed map of America in 1857, which became one of the early documents introducing the outside world to Koreans.<sup>88</sup> In Choi's manuscript describing America, the first thing he pointed was that America was a country of vast territory and with abundant natural resources.<sup>89</sup> In addition, after the ratification of the Korean-American treaty in 1882, the Korean government dispatched a diplomatic delegation to America. Young-Ick Min, a chief envoy of the mission, noted the richness of the land among his first impressions of the United States. Min reported to the King on the mission: "That country produces all the grains of the earth, its people all work hard, and its trade is so prosperous that there is no other nation that can be compared with it."<sup>90</sup> The symbol of "Canaan" in Lim's sermon is based on these idealized images of America that Korean immigrants brought with them.

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<sup>88</sup> Choi's work was entitled *Jigu Cheonyo* (Concise Description of the Earth). In the nineteenth century, Chosen scholars, who belonged to the school of *Silhak* (the practical learning), began to receive the modern geographical knowledge. They challenged Chosen Sinocentric worldview and tried to introduce new knowledge to Koreans. However, the traditionalists persecuted these progressive scholars because they considered Western learnings including Catholicism as harmful and evil which stood against traditional Confucian order.

<sup>89</sup> Lew, Young Ick. "A Historical Overview of Korean Perceptions of the United States: Five Major Stereotypes" Lew, Young Ick & Byong-Kie Song & Ho-Min Yang & Hy-sop Lim. Trans. By Michael Finch. *Korean Perceptions of the United States: A History of Their Origins and Formation*. Seoul: Jimoondang, 2006. p.1-52. p.15.

<sup>90</sup> Mun, Il Pyeong. *Han-mi Osimnyeon-sa* (Fifty Years of Chosen-American History) Seoul: Chongwangsa, 1945. p.113. quoted in *Ibid.*, p.21; quoted also in Kang, Hyeon-Dew, *Media Culture in Korea*. Seoul, Korea: Seoul National University, 1991. p.22.

Canaan symbolizes the final destination of pilgrimage as the Promised Land given by God. However, while Rev. Kim viewed the immigrant lives as those of sojourners who are on the way to Canaan, Lim interpreted that Korean immigrants are already in Canaan based on the economic and political disparity between Korea and America. The following testimony of one Korean immigrant quoted in Rev. Lim's essay manifests that the transnational interpretation was the basis of Korean immigrants' understanding of their lives in America.

It was when I went to Hawaii for leading a revival meeting in one Korean American church. After the meeting, I was about to leave for the airport early in the morning on Saturday. Then, one young deacon(*jipsa*) drove his van and offered a ride to the airport. I got on his van with great gratitude. We arrived at the airport ahead of the departure time. He bought me coffee and some snacks and we had a talk. He said he had been brought up in the mountains in *Kangweon* and he survived on nothing more than corns and potatoes when he was in Korea. He also said that he was working as a gardener and even if he were not rich, he appreciates his life because the life in Hawaii was like living in paradise in comparison with his past in Korea. Though young people may not be able to understand, if we hear the hardships of those who have experienced Japanese colonization, post-colonization disorder and the Korean War, we cannot help thanking God for our current lives in America.<sup>91</sup>

In the quote above, the young deacon was satisfied with his life in America in comparison with the tragic history in Korea, saying, "the life in Hawaii is like living in paradise in comparison with his past in Korea" Based on the testimony of the young deacon in Hawaii, Lim contended that Koreans in America should be content with their lives by remembering all the hard historical times including

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<sup>91</sup> Lim, Dong-Sun. "Pungseonghan Sam (Affluent Life)" Lim, Dong Seon. 2000. *Op. Cit.*:354-367. p.361

“Japanese colonization, post-colonization disorder and the Korean War,” although they did not experience them firsthand.

In addition, Lim’s interpretation that Korean Americans are already in Canaan is based on the disparity between America and other countries around the world.

With God’s grace and your understanding from the church, I have been to so many countries in the world. Nevertheless, I could not find a country as good as America. I have been to France, Great Britain, Germany and Italy and America is beyond comparison. They are not economically sufficient. Neither are they sufficient in education and culture. China will follow American after at least 50 years. Russia is suffering from unspeakable hardships. In comparison to these countries, America is a huge country and owns fertile land. Needless to say, there is desert. However, America is a rich country which guarantees the freedom of speech, religion, association and residence. In addition, there are many middle class people and it is good for the education of children. Anyone will get the opportunities if he only works and is able. America is a country with good welfare system for the old, children and the handicapped. America is a country with good housing and medical facilities as well as good transportation and good cars.

Several years ago, I went to Gabon, in Africa. There, there was just one flight from Gabon to the neighboring country, Kenya. However, in America, even if we miss the flight, we can take the next flight or a different airline or we can use another airport. America is a country which is so convenient with regard to transportation. Furthermore, America is a very good country where we can eat any food from any country.

The first world countries should have these three things: the passion for education, military power, and economic power. While the Soviet Union does not have economic power, and Japan does not have military power, America is the country with three things. In Europe, it is not an exaggeration to express that many churches are dead. However, American spirit is alive. Some churches are said to have 30,000 to 50,000 members and they run 150 church buses to take the children to their Sunday Schools. We can say that America is a country which is alive with spirit. We came to this country and live

without worrying about the satisfaction of basic living conditions by getting permanent residency and American citizenship. We are educating our children as internationally competent people and enjoying the freedom of our faith. Considering all these things, we can say that we are living in Canaan. Therefore, we should be thankful for our lives because we are living in Canaan.<sup>92</sup>

Lim's metaphor of America as Canaan through the illustration of superior elements of the U.S. to other countries reveals his intention to encourage Korean immigrants to take pride in "being in America" or "becoming Americans" regardless of their own status within America. Lim's Biblical application strengthened his purpose of convincing the Korean American congregation that they made the right choice despite their current difficult situations. According to Lim, it is not right for Korean immigrants to complain about their current lives because they are living in America which he argued is the current Canaan. The Biblical symbol of Canaan provides absolute power to make their immigrant lives more meaningful. This is the same idea as Rev. Kim's "Haran" metaphor. Even if they are having difficulties, they still have made the right choice.

Furthermore, as in Kim's application of God's material blessings on Abraham's family, the linear progress from Exodus to the entrance into Canaan in Lim's narratives sanctified the experiences of Korean American immigrants who are pursuing successful settlement in America through their material achievements. Based on this process, Korean Americans are distinct from Koreans in Korea in the

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<sup>92</sup> Lim Dong Seon. "Hananimkkye Gamsahara (Thank God)" Lim, Dong Seon. 2000. *Ibid.*: 312-328. p.319-320.

sense that Korean Americans have more material benefits which is regarded as evidence of God's favor.

Now, we have been living in good places since we moved to America. No matter whether you own your house or you are renting a house, you can eat anything you want as long as you open your refrigerator and you are in a decent environment. But don't think that everything resulted from your own ability. I am telling you to remember that God provided everything for us. Last week, I visited one of our church members who just moved to his own house. I felt really happy looking out at a beautiful view from this good house. After we finished our prayer meeting, I said to him, " Everything is due to God's grace. God prepared this house for you to live in and educate your children. You didn't do anything to build this house, did you?" He answered, " No. I just appreciate grace from God."

I find that almost every family owns their house ten years after they immigrate to America and they have good cars, and fine furniture. In addition, they are giving good education to their children. Were all these blessings because of us? No. I believe this is because God is always with us and helps us with His grace.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Lim, Dong-Sun. "Thanksgiving in the Feast of Tabernacles" (1991) Lim Dong Sun, 2000. *Ibid.* p.338-339

#### **IV. CONCLUSION**

During the first two decades after the entrance of the post-1965 immigrants, Korean immigrants tended to maintain strong Korean identity and evaluate their lives in comparison with their counterparts in Korea. As a result, Korean immigrants made sense of their lives in America beyond the social contexts in the United States and focused on their own material successes as part of American prosperity in the short-term. As seen in the cases of Rev. Kye-Yong Kim and Rev. Dong-Sun Lim, in the process of retelling the Biblical story, their interpretations add “holy” meanings to Korean American identities through the metaphorical connection between their transnational movements and experiences and Biblical stories. This process connects their old society they left and the country to which they immigrated and promotes their group solidarity as Koreans in America. They are Koreans, but Koreans in America, God’s Chosen people who are blessed to live in God’s Promised Land.

## CHAPTER 4 AMERICANS WITH KOREAN HERITAGE

Post-1965 Korean immigrants came to America with the belief that they could achieve material success in America commensurate with their efforts. So they have focused primarily on their own material achievements and the education of their children. During the first two decades, Korean Americans lived isolated from other racial groups and still focused on their counterparts in Korea. For them, Korean American ethnic churches served as “an ethnic sanctuary with ethnic island mentality,” according to sociologist Reverend Young Lee Hertig.<sup>1</sup>

However, since the 1990s, Korean immigrant communities have gone through a transformation influenced by factors inside and outside America. The economic growth of South Korea and increasing anti-American sentiments based on Korean national pride changed Korean perceptions toward American immigration. Furthermore, the internationally broadcast turmoil of the Los Angeles Riot<sup>2</sup> shattered the image of America as a dream country. Koreans no longer dreamed of living in America and Korean Americans expressed their disappointment and anger toward American society which they thought had betrayed their dreams and efforts of decades.

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<sup>1</sup> Young Lee Hertig. “The Korean Immigrant Church and Naked Public Square” Matsuoka, Fumitaka & Eleazar S. Fernandez. ed. *Realizing the America of Our Hearts: Theological Voices of Asian Americans*. St. Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press. 2003: 131-146. p.139.

<sup>2</sup> I will discuss it in detail later in this chapter.

These factors served as motivation for Korean Americans to reflect on their status as one of the racial and ethnic minority groups in American multiracial society and to realize that they had lived in isolation without knowledge of the multiracial environment. Korean Americans began to make efforts to understand racial relations in America and to build up relations with other racial groups for survival. They needed to establish what it means to be Americans with a Korean ethnic background, in the relationship with non-Korean groups including whites and non-whites.

This chapter will examine how Korean American Christians promote their American identity with Korean heritage through use of Christian narratives. The identity of “us” is established in the relationship to “other.” Therefore, through Christianity, they pursue what it means to be “us” and to be “others.” For them, Christianity serves as an agent for Korean immigrants and their children to feel more meaningful in America than being a marginalized minority group. Through their Christian narratives, Korean American Christians conflate Christian identity and Korean ethnic identity and stand apart from the rest of society which is not Christian enough from their perspective.



## **I. THE CHALLENGES OF KOREAN AMERICANS**

### **A. The development of South Korea and South Korean anti-Americanism**

After thirty-five years of colonization by Japan and three years of civil war, South Korea was a poverty-stricken poor nation. South Korea's per capita gross national product (GNP) was only \$82 in 1961. However, in the 1970s and 1980s, Korea achieved miraculously rapid economic growth. The per capita GNP increased to \$1,640 in 1981<sup>3</sup> and South Korea's economic growth surprised the world when it successfully hosted the Olympic Games in Seoul in 1988. In 1995, its per capita income reached \$10,000 which was a cause for celebration.<sup>4</sup>

The high growth rate of South Korea's economy was attributed to foreign investment, particularly Japanese capital after the normalization of the relationship between Korea and Japan in 1965<sup>5</sup> and the influx of a large amount of money as payment for South Korea's participation in Vietnam War.<sup>6</sup> This money from

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<sup>3</sup> Kim, Uichol and Young-Shin Park. "Perception of American People, Society, and Influence: Psychological, Social, and Cultural Analysis of Anti-American Sentiments in South Korea." Steinberg, David I. ed., *Korean Attitudes Toward the United States: Changing Dynamics*. Armonk, New York: An East Gate Book, 2005:247-265. p.252.

<sup>4</sup> Hahm, Chaibong. "Anti-Americanism, Korean Style" *Ibid.*:220-230. p.224.

<sup>5</sup> "After the normalization of Korea-Japan relations brought about \$800 million to Korea between 1965 and 1975, the money consisting of \$300 million in grants, \$200 million in conditional loans, and \$300 million in commercial loans." Lee, Sang-Dawn. *Big Brother, Little Brother: The American Influence on Korean Culture in the Lyndon B. Johnson Years*, Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2002. p.49.

<sup>6</sup> The United States paid \$130.2 million overseas allowance for Korean soldiers from 1965 through 1969 which went directly to Korean government. *Ibid.*, p.50.

foreign investments lay the foundation of Korean economic development and the fifth president Chung-Hie Park twice enacted five-year plans for economic growth in the 1970s. America served as a profitable market for the South Korean export-oriented economy and South Korea achieved a “miracle in *Han* River.”<sup>7</sup> During the first five years, annual GNP growth averaged 8.3 percent. Then during the second plan, annual GNP growth even rose to 11.4 per cent.<sup>8</sup>

South Korea’s economic growth reduced the differences of the social conditions between South Korea and America due to the improvement of Korea’s living conditions and the adoption of advanced culture and lifestyles which Korean Americans had longed for when they left Korea for America. Through frequent communication with their Korean siblings and friends in addition to the portrayal of Koreans’ affluent lives in the media, Korean Americans witnessed the improving socioeconomic conditions of their Korean counterparts. In contrast, many were experiencing downward social status due to their inability to use Korean educational degrees and due to language barriers. Anthropologists Nancy Abelmann and John Lie provides this phenomenon.

One 1970s immigrant noted that until the early 1980s, when she returned to Seoul her friends and relatives were envious of her material possessions and the charmed life in America. Yet by the late 1980s, she was shocked that a salesperson in a small Seoul store offered her a great discount on a dress she wanted to buy: “He told me that he had a sister who emigrated to America

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<sup>7</sup> *Han* River is a big river in the middle of Seoul.

<sup>8</sup> Breen, Michael. *The Koreans: Who They Are, What They Want, Where Their Future Lies*. New York: Thomas Dunne Books. 1998. p.136.

and what horrible trails they had to go through. So he said: 'I know the kind of troubles you face in America so I want to sell the dress at cost. It's the least I can do for people like you who have suffered so much.'"<sup>9</sup>

Another example is negative descriptions of Korean Americans in South Korea's TV drama. One of the popular Korean sitcoms, *LA Arirang* which was broadcast in 1995 and 1996, caricatured Korean Americans in humiliating ways.<sup>10</sup> On one drama broadcast in 1996, a character made fun of Korean immigrants by saying that Korean Americans were at most washing underwear of blacks after they ventured to immigrate to America. Korean immigrants felt infuriated and they protested against the Korean broadcast company.<sup>11</sup>

In addition, the increasing anti-American sentiments among South Koreans influenced a widening of the gap in the perception between Koreans and Korean Americans. Since the late 1980s, Korean dependence on America for security and economics had been reduced and anti-Americanism was revealed openly on many issues concerning their relations. For instance, in 1985, a dozen students occupied a U.S. embassy annex in which the American culture and information center was located, demanding an apology for the bloody suppression of the *Kwangju* uprising

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<sup>9</sup> Abelmann, Nancy & John Lie. *Blue Dreams: Korean Americans and the Los Angeles Riots*. Boston, MA: Harvard University Press. 1995. p.80.

<sup>10</sup> Moon, Chung-In. "Between *Banmi*(Anti-Americansim) and *Sunmi*(Worship of the United States): Dynamics of Changing U.S. Images in South Korea." Steinberg, David I. ed., *Op. Cit.*:139-152. p.143.

<sup>11</sup> Choi, Hyeop & Chan Wung Park. *Segye ui Hangukin: Miguk. Kyenada (Korean in the World: U.S.A and Canada.)* Seoul: Tongilweon, 1996. p.147.

in 1980,<sup>12</sup> because Koreans suspected that America supported the Korean dictatorial government led by military authority Doo-Hwan Chun.

In addition to the causes of anti-Americanism in the political sphere, the American “undisciplined” behaviors according to Koreans’ criterion affected Korean unfavorable attitudes toward Americans. For instance, during the opening ceremony of the 1988 Seoul Olympics, American athletes behaved unruly as a way to express their excitements, including Carl Lewis, well-known American track and field athlete. During the Olympics, Koreans criticized Lewis for having a haughty air.<sup>13</sup>

This unfavorable Korean sentiment influenced their attitudes toward Korean Americans who visited Korea. Very often, Koreans expressed their bad feelings when they meet young Korean Americans who are not fluent in Korea and behave differently. The personal experiences of Korean Americans who visited Korea testified to unfavorable sentiment toward Korean Americans. Mi-Chin Park, a Korean American student who went to the graduate school of international relations in Yonsei University in Seoul, recalled that people treated her as a traitor who abandoned her own nation.<sup>14</sup>

As time passed, the differences widened between Koreans in Korea and Korean Americans in terms of ideology, socioeconomic status, and cultures. This

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<sup>12</sup> Moon, Chung-In. *Op. Cit.*, p.146.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p.145.

<sup>14</sup> Park, Mi Chin. *Korean American Ethnicity, Transnationalism and Multiethnic America*. Master Thesis. Seoul, Yonsei University, 1999. p. 9

widening gap between these two groups caused the shift of Korean immigrants' focus from their homeland to their new country.

## **B. The 1992 Los Angeles Riot**

For Korean immigrants, the Los Angeles Riot in 1992 was “the darkest hours in their century-old American passage,”<sup>15</sup> according to Korean American journalist Kyung-Won Lee. African Americans ruthlessly destroyed and looted Korean American businesses in the Los Angeles Koreatown as their expression of anger about the acquittal of white policemen charged with beating Rodney King, an African American. After three days of demonstration and disturbances, it was reported that “58 people were dead (including Korean American teenager, Edward Jaeseong Lee), 2,400 were injured, 11,700 arrested and \$717 million in damages.”<sup>16</sup> According to the report from the Korean American community, about 2,800 businesses failed as a result of the riot.<sup>17</sup>

Though the immediate cause of the riot was a racial tension between white policeman and an African American young man, the Black-Korean conflict was most revealing throughout the riot. *Newsweek* Journalist Tom Morganthau argued

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<sup>15</sup> Lee, Kyung Won “Sa-I-Gu: A Haunting Prelude to the Fire Next Time” in Lee, Samuel, ed. *The Most Tragic Incident in 100-Year History of the Korean Americans: Victorious Out of the Ashes*. Los Angeles: The April 29 Association. 2003. p.130

<sup>16</sup> Wheeler, B. Gordon. *Black California: The History of African-Americans in the Golden State*. New York: Hippocrene Books. 1993. p.274. quoted in Abelman, Nancy & John Lie. *Op. Cit.*, p.2.

<sup>17</sup> Lee, Sung-Joo. ed. *The April 29<sup>th</sup> Los Angeles Riot White Paper.: Investigation of L.A. Riot*. (Angles: The April 29 Association. 2003. (Korean) p.213.

that the devastation of the Korean immigrant community during the riot showed that the nation is “moving toward a multiethnic future in which Asians, Hispanics, Caribbean islanders and many other immigrant groups compose a diverse and changing social mosaic that cannot be described by the old vocabulary of race relations in America.”<sup>18</sup>

However, the question still went to why it was Korean immigrants. The mainstream media focused on Black-Korean conflict frame in the Southern California by overlapping the 1992 riot with the Soon-Ja Du incident in 1991. A year before the riot, in South Los Angeles, a female Korean grocer, Soon-Ja Du, shot and killed a fifteen-year-old African American girl, Latasha Harlins who was allegedly shoplifting, but Du was released with a light sentence. As a reaction to this incident, African Americans expressed their disapproval by boycotting and looting Korean shops.

Furthermore, African American rap artist Ice Cube issued “Black Korea” which was based on Du’s conviction.<sup>19</sup> This song represented African American

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<sup>18</sup> Morgenthau, Tom. “Beyond Black & White.” *Newsweek*, May 18, 1992:28-30. p.28.

<sup>19</sup> Blends into intro with dialogue from Spike Lee’s *Do the Right Thing*.

“Twenty D Energizers.”

“Twenty, C Energizer?”

“D, not C, D.”

“B Energizer?”

“D motherfucker, D! Learn to speak english first, alright? D!”

“How many you say?”

“Twenty, motherfucker, twenty.”

“Honey...”

“Mother-fuck you!”

*Ice Cube*

Everytime I wanna go get a fuckin brew

voices against Korean Americans and the “Black Korea” fans expressed their anger toward Korean Americans as their reactions to the Rodney King verdict.

In addition, the relationship between Korean American shopkeepers and poor African American customers in urban area caused conflict between the two groups. Until the 1960s, Jewish Americans had occupied the current Koreatown business area which was primarily an African American residency. But after the Watts riot,<sup>20</sup> the Jewish Americans left for relatively safe areas and post-1965 Korean immigrants filled the emptied business areas. Korean immigrants who had brought capital from home were able to open their own businesses. African American customers had expressed their antipathy toward Korean Americans for exploiting their resources as they did to Jewish Americans. Furthermore, Korean shopkeepers showed the contemptuous attitudes toward African American

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I gotta go down to the store with the two  
oriental one-penny countin motherfuckers  
that make a nigga made enough to cause a little ruckus  
Thinkin every brother in the world's out to take  
So they watch every damn move that I make  
They hope I don't pull out a gat and try to rob  
they funky little store, but bitch, I got a job  
("Look you little Chinese motherfucker  
I ain't tryin to steal none of yo' shit, leave me alone!"  
"Mother-fuck you!")  
Yo yo, check it out  
So don't follow me, up and down your market  
Or your little chop suey ass'll be a target  
of the nationwide boycott  
Juice with the people, that's what the boy got  
So pay respect to the black fist  
or we'll burn your store, right down to a crisp  
And then we'll see ya!  
Cause you can't turn the ghetto - into Black Korea  
  
"I do fuck you!"

<sup>20</sup> Watts Riots refers to a large-scale riot which lasted six days in the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles, California, in August 1965.

customers. Frequent contact between the two groups because of their geographical proximity in daily lives and the prejudicial attitudes toward each other aggravated Black-Korean conflict.

Nevertheless, the Korean American reaction to the L.A. Riot was that they were scapegoats of deeply rooted American racism against African Americans. Korean Americans believed that they were targets of the violence only because they were geographically close and they were also victims of American racism. Throughout the riot, Korean Americans felt powerless during the collapse of their mom-and-pop stores. Korean Americans criticized the ignorance of local police officials and American mainstream media's portrayal of Korean Americans who were armed for their own safety as aggressors against African Americans.<sup>21</sup> They attributed this to their status of being politically powerless.<sup>22</sup>

Korean American sociologist Pyong-Gap Min explained the cause of the riot in the position of Korean Americans as "the middleman minority."<sup>23</sup> In economic structure of the United States, Korea Americans forms a buffer zone that lies between the upper class of European Americans and the lower class of African

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<sup>21</sup> Chang, Taehwan. *Joongang USA*. May 9, 1992. Chang compared the Watts Riot of 1965 with the L.A. Riot of 1992. He said, "There is one thing we have to remember with respect to this riot. It took only 4 hours for the dispatching of State Guard. 27 years ago, while it was delayed over 24 hours in our case."

Kim, Jeongbin. "The LAPD who I hate more than the rioters." May. 1. 1992; Choi, Jimmy. *The Los Angeles Times*, May 5. 1992.

<sup>22</sup> Many Korean Americans maintained that they needed political organization and politics who could represent them. Lee, Sookhie. *Joongang USA*. June 7, 1992. "We have to elect Korean American representatives to avoid this sorrow and pain."

<sup>23</sup> Min, Pyong-Gap. *Caught in the Middle: Korean Merchants in America's Multiethnic Cities*. Berkeley, California: University of California Press. 1996.



Americans. Therefore, Korean American merchants are hated by both sides. Based on this idea, any minority group in the position of middleman class would have been victims of the riot.

In conclusion, the riot raised disputes from diverse perspectives and both Korean Americans and African Americans were at each other's throats over the riot.

## II. RACIAL PERCEPTIONS OF KOREAN AMERICANS

When my parents who recently immigrated to America mentioned "Americans," it means only "white Americans," who are not Asian Americans. I was born in America, and I know America more than any other Asian countries. Then am I supposed to be called "an American"?<sup>24</sup>

When the first generation Korean Americans say *miguk-in*(American), they generally meant "white Americans." In referring to African Americans, Koreans use "*Heuk-In* (Black-skinned person)," which describes them by skin color while they use "Mexican" a term of nationality for Hispanics. Furthermore, Korean Americans used "*Dongyang-In*(People from East)" for Asian Americans, which is based on the cultural similarities in contrast with the western culture. This

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<sup>24</sup> Kim, You-Kyong, Elaine H. Kim, Charles J. Kim & In Sook Hong. *A-ee-deul Ttaemoon-ae: Miguk-imin kwa Janye Gyoyuk (Educating Korean Children in the United States)*. Seoul, Korea: Yong Hak Publishing Co. 1987. p.230

inconsistency in referring to different racial groups is related to Korean Americans' pre-immigrant racial perceptions.

According to sociologist Nadia Kim,<sup>25</sup> "although in certain contexts South Koreans acknowledge pan-national categories of yellow, white, black, etc., they typically distinguish races as Koreans, Japanese, Vietnamese, Germans, Italians, Spaniards, etc."<sup>26</sup> Kim also argued that because Korea has been a country of one ethnic group, Korean racial categorization system is to conflate race with a nation's majority or ruling group.<sup>27</sup> Based on Kim's explanation, Koreans refer to white Americans as just "Americans" by the influence of America's white-led racial model.

In addition to the South Korean categorization system of race, the initial contact of Koreans with white American missionaries contributed to the perceptions that Americans are racially white. The images of American missionaries as nice and refined middle class people were connected to racial whiteness. Furthermore, the America-led modernization of post-colonized Korea promoted the formation of a perceptual connection between whiteness and their ideal images in terms of

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<sup>25</sup> Nadia Kim examined how their pre-immigrant racial perceptions influence their post-immigrant experiences with African Americans and Latinos. Kim, Nadia Y. "A View from Below: An Analysis of Korean Americans' Racial Attitudes" *Amerasia Journal* 30:1 (2004):1-19; Kim, Nadia Y. "Seoul-America" on America's "Soul": South Koreans and Korean Immigrants Navigate Global White Racial Ideology." *Critical Sociology*, Vol 32. Issue 2-3. 2006:381-402; Kim, Nadia Y. *Guests in Someone Else's House?: Korean Immigrants in Los Angeles Negotiate America 'Race,' Nationhood, and Identity*. Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Sociology, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI. 2003.

<sup>26</sup> Kim, Nadia Y. 2006. *Ibid.*, p.386

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

modernity and life styles. The following interviews by Nadia Kim illustrate this perception among Koreans.

(Mr. M. Bahgn): when I think of whites, the picture in my head is of people wearing tuxedos at a party and walking around holding champagne.  
(Miss E. Yi) when I was young, although I don't really think that way now, I thought all whites were rich. Like when I watched Hollywood movies, I thought even the beggars looked stylish!  
(Miss. H. Ha) well, I still think that way now(laugh). If they're white then I think that they're rich!<sup>28</sup>

Another of Kim's surveys revealed the positive perception of whites among Korean Americans. According to Kim, only 1 percent of respondents thought Whites to be poor, while 67 percent believed Whites to be intelligent. In addition, 74 percent answered that the Whites are both rich and self-supporting.<sup>29</sup> Kim attributed Koreans' highly "positive" racial stereotypes of Whites to their "noted idealization of phenotypic and material markers of (American) whiteness since the Korean War."<sup>30</sup>

On the other hand, Korean encounters with black Americans were limited to African American soldiers in American armies stationed in South Korea after the Korean War. Therefore, the images of African Americans were interwoven with those of GI culture which Koreans considered as vulgar and negative.<sup>31</sup> In addition,

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p.387.

<sup>29</sup> Kim, Nadia Y. 2004. *Op. Cit.*, p.9.

<sup>30</sup> *Idid.*

<sup>31</sup> Lim, Hy-seop. "Hanmi Munhwagwangyee Daehan Yeongu: Hanguginui Migungmunhwa Injigujoreul Jungsimeuro (The Studies of Cultural Relations between Korea and America: Focusing

the negative images of African Americans in many American movies, television shows and American Forces Korea Network (AFKN) programs imported to Korea in the 1970s and 1980s influenced the construction of white-black binary racial views of Koreans. American media portrayed African Americans as “criminals, welfare recipients, alcoholics, drug addicts, or simply lazy”<sup>32</sup>

These Korean racial views influenced their attitudes toward non-white groups after they immigrated to America. For instance, Korean immigrant parents want their children to associate with whites but distance themselves from African Americans:

One of my close friends from school is an African American. Even though he is a great person, my parents told me not to bring him to my house. They said that white friends are okay, but not black friends:<sup>33</sup>

The disapproval of bringing home African American friends is based on the hope of Korean immigrant parents that their children will associate with the ruling racial groups.

According to Korean sociologist In-Jin Yoon, in American society, whites have established discriminative racial structure with themselves on top and blacks

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on Korean Cognitions of American Cultures.) Korea University Asiatic Center ed. *American Influences on Korean culture*. Seoul: Hyeonamsa. 1984:76-99. p.87.; Lew, Young Ick & Byong-Kie Song & Ho-Min Yang & Hy-sop Lim. Trans. By Michael Finch. *Korean Perceptions of the United States: A History of Their Origins and Formation*. Seoul: Jimoondang, 2006

<sup>32</sup> Chang, Edward T. “New Urban Crisis: Korean-African American Relations” Kim, Kwang Jung ed. *Koreans in the Hood: Conflict with African Americans*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press. 1999:39-59. p.43

<sup>33</sup> Kim, You-Kyong, Elaine H. Kim, Charles J. Kim & In Sook Hong. *Op. Cit.*, p.229

on the bottom and this hierarchical perception has influenced the contemptuous attitudes within non-white minority groups toward each other. Yoon said, “the desire for acceptance by whites is often expressed as the desire for dissociation from American blacks.”<sup>34</sup> Based on Yoon’s argument, the tendency of Korean Americans to distance themselves from African Americans is the expression of their desire to identify with power. In particular, Korean Americans’ strong aspirations for upward mobility and economic success in America further motivated their disassociation from groups who are seen to have low social and economic standing.

Furthermore, sociologist Edward Chang found Korean Americans’ racial prejudice toward African Americans in Korean Confucian values which emphasized education. According to Chang, Korean Confucian ideology is consistent with Koreans’ belief in the notion of “meritocracy” in which “one can rise as high as one’s talents and abilities permit.”<sup>35</sup> Therefore, Korean Americans tend to look down on African Americans who have a relatively low educational level.

The reason why there are crimes by blacks is that they don’t have jobs. They don’t have jobs because they don’t go to school. In addition, the reason why there are many juvenile delinquents among them is because they are raised under one single mom who gets welfare irresponsibly. There are many who

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<sup>34</sup> Yoon, In-Jin. *On My Own: Korean Businesses and Race Relations in America*. Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1997. p.202

<sup>35</sup> Chang, Edward T. 1999. *Op. Cit.*, p.43

don't even know who their fathers are. Don't they have choice but steal from others when they have no education?:<sup>36</sup>

Ryu's view reflects typical model minority perspectives toward African Americans, attributing the poverty of African Americans to their lack of education and welfare dependency.<sup>37</sup> Ryu expressed his prejudice of underclass African Americans, criticizing their ethical problems as a cause of their poverty. However, the responses by middle-class African Americans in Stewart's interview illustrate that Korean Americans' racial prejudices about African Americans are based on skin color regardless of their class. In the interviews, middle class African Americans responded that Korean Americans treated them the same way.

"It doesn't matter what my status is, how I'm dressed, when I go into those stores, some Koreans are just plain rude regardless of how courteous I am." Another professional stated, "I could wear a jogging suit or a three-piece suit, I'd still be treated the same by some Korean merchants as though I'm from Mars."<sup>38</sup>

Furthermore, research shows that Korean Americans have prejudice against Latinos as much as toward African Americans. According to Nadia Kim's survey, 51 percent of respondents thought Latinos were less intelligent and 74 percent

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<sup>36</sup> Ryu, Hyeong-gi. *Hanmaeum*. 1981. 5. 31. Vol. 1. p. 3

<sup>37</sup> Ella Stewart, an instructor of speech communications at Los Angeles Trade Technical college, listed four myths and preconceived ideas of Korean Americans about African Americans based on her survey. 1. African Americans are lazy and do not like to work. 2. African Americans enjoy being on welfare. 3. African Americans are inferior and therefore deserve to be treated in any inferior way. 4. African Americans are jealous of Korean Americans and resent their presence in the Community. Stewart, Ella "Communication between African Americans and Korean Americans: Before and After the Los Angeles Riots." *Amerasia Journal*. 19:2(1993):23-53, p.43-44.

perceived that Latinos were welfare-dependent. Despite Korean Americans' prejudice toward Latinos, they prefer hiring Latinos to African Americans based on their perceptions that "Latinos possess a more desirable work ethic and personality traits" including "hardworking, docile, honest, prompt, responsible, and trustworthy"<sup>39</sup> Therefore, as Edward Chang and his co-author argued, Korean Americans used positive comments toward Latinos only in relation to "Latino immigrants' utility to Koreans' entrepreneurial goal."<sup>40</sup>

While Korean Americans generally reveal negatives views toward African Americans and Latinos, they have somewhat favorable opinions about other Asian Americans. However, Korean Americans view themselves as a distinct racial group from other Asian Americans. Though Asian Americans have similarities between each other from non-Asians' perspectives, Asian American groups do not have clear notion of their pan-Asian ethnic identity, according to anthropologist Jae-hyup Lee in his study on the identity formation of three different Asian American groups in Philadelphia.<sup>41</sup> According to Lee, each Asian American group develops its own ethnic identity based on each one's own culture and history, even though different Asian Americans are treated as one group by the general public and government.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p.34.

<sup>39</sup> Yoon, In Jin. *Op. Cit.*, p.210.

<sup>40</sup> Kim, Nadia. 2004. *Op. Cit.*, p.5.

<sup>41</sup> Lee, Jae-Hyup. *Dynamics of Ethnic Identity: Three Asian American Communities in Philadelphia*. New York: Garland Publishing, 1998.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p.77.

Therefore, Asian Americans have different experiences by contact with each other and stereotypes of each other. For example, Korean Americans have historic hostility toward Japanese based on the colonization history. In addition, they have stereotypes of people from South Asian countries as political refugees and the images of gangs. For example, in the interview by Jae-Hyup Lee, a young Korean American said about Vietnamese Americans: “Man, I almost got killed at one of the Vietnamese parties. I happened to be there. They (Vietnamese teenagers) started to tease me. They are really rough people. You better not touch them.”<sup>43</sup>

In conclusion, Korean American racial perceptions are very prejudiced and reflect their pre-immigrant perceptions about race. Therefore, Korean Americans tend to associate with Whites rather than with other minority groups. According to the research on the education of Korean immigrant children, education specialists found that Korean American parents often told their children “don’t hang out with other Koreans.”<sup>44</sup> This is because Korean parents want their children to use English well enough to be competitive with Americans because they want their children to achieve success in education and jobs in a short time. When they said that, they generally meant “hang out with white American.” However, simultaneously, Korean Americans have strong ethnocentric attitudes in the relationship with non-Koreans. The following well shows the contradictory attitudes of Korean Americans.

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p.89.

<sup>44</sup> Kim, You-Kyong, Elain H. Kim, Charles J. Kim & In Sook Hong. *Op.Cit.*, p.170



When I was nine, we all moved into the suburbs where most residents were whites. It was natural to have only white classmates in my school and to have opportunity to date whites. But my parents insist that I should not only marry a Korean but also even date only Koreans. I think they are wrong. First of all, it was their decision that we moved to a white neighborhood with no Koreans. Secondly, they taught me that all human beings are equal. So, I am so confused because their thoughts seem to be contradictory.<sup>45</sup>

Based on these Korean American perceptions of other racial groups in America, I will examine how they establish what it means to be Korean Americans through Christianity.

### **III. AMERICANS WITH KOREAN HERITAGE THROUGH CHRISTIANITY**

#### **A. The Reaction to the Los Angeles Riot.**

Eu-Young Yu, a Korean American sociologist and an elder at Youngnak, wrote an article in *The Los Angeles Times* after the riot that was translated and published in the Korean ethnic newspaper, *Joongang USA*.

Korean Americans are shocked and dismayed. We are shocked because we did not know that what happened in Los Angeles last week could happen in this country. We came to this country with a dream to build a new and better life; waking up in early morning hours, putting in 14 hours a day, going to bed a midnight, six to seven days a week, without a vacation for years so that we could send our kids to college to fulfill that dream. We built our homes,

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p.186

our businesses and our town with tears and toil. We transformed a rundown section of the center city into the booming Koreatown, full of life, enthusiasm and hope. Last week, we saw our lifelong dreams ransacked and burned down for no reason.<sup>46</sup>

According to Yu, Korean immigrants were those who contributed to the development of the Koreatown area by “transforming a rundown section of the section of the center city into the booming Koreatown, full of life, enthusiasm and hope.” Yu refused to accept the criticism that Korean American small businesses owners were making money from African American residents and customers, but hardly contributed to the community. According to Yu’s article which represented the voices of Korean American communities in mainstream American media, the L.A. Riot had nothing to with what Korean Americans had done. From Yu’s point of view, Korean Americans were victims of the system which puts “Eurocentric civilization above all.”<sup>47</sup> The target of African Americans was Korean Americans only because they were in that spot, not because they were Korean Americans.

In addition, Korean American scholar Elaine Kim challenged the media’s portrayal of the riot as the Black-Korean conflicts. Kim said, “The so-called Black-Korean problem is a decontextualized manifestation of a much larger problem”<sup>48</sup> Kim continued to emphasize that Korean Americans were another victim of American racism, saying “When the Los Angeles Police Department and the state government failed to respond to the initial outbreak of violence in South-Central, I

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<sup>46</sup> Yu, Eu-young. *The Los Angeles Times*. May 5, 1992.; Translated in *Joongang*. May 6, 1992.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

suspected that Korean-Americans were being used as human shields to protect the real source of rage.”<sup>49</sup> Korean ethnic newspaper *Joongang USA* translated both articles as examples of Korean American voices published in the mainstream media.

Christian narratives of Korean Americans as responses to this Black-Korean conflict reflect and reinforce these responses of Korean American communities. Korean American Christian leaders interpreted this riot based on the binary perceptions between victims (themselves), and the assailants. Rev. Paul Yung, the minister of the English-speaking department at Youngnak preached about the riot, viewing Korean Americans as innocent victims and that they should be healed and comforted by the love of Jesus Christ. Yung expressed his disappointment in America which let the innocent people down.

Yes, I confess to you that my heart was full of anger and hostility and anger these past three days, but I couldn't help myself. So I asked—I asked all first-generation Korean Americans, “Why have we come to this place? Why have we come to this country in the first place?” How foolish we were to follow the American dream, and how naïve we were to believe in harmony among different races. That much was I filled with anger.<sup>50</sup>

Yung preached based on the biblical story of the Samaritan who helped a passer-by who was traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho and was beaten and robbed by a

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<sup>48</sup> Kim, Elaine. “They Armed in Self-Defense.” *Newsweek*, May 18, 1992. p.10.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> Yung, Paul. “Who Is My Neighbor?” Castuera, Ignacio ed., *Dreams on Fire, Embers of Hope: From the Pulpits of Los Angeles After the Riots*. St. Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press. 1992. p.17-23. p.17-18.

burglar on the way. He was lying down wounded on the street. A priest and a Levite passed by without helping the man, but a Samaritan, who was looked down on by the Jewish at that time, stopped and took care of him.

This scripture is popularly used in Korean sermons on condemning careless Christians who are not helping the needy because of their personal businesses like the priest and the Levite in the Bible. However, in his sermon, Yung identified Korean Americans with the innocent passer-by, saying “I had to be identified with the person who was robbed.” Then, in Yung’s sermon, Jesus Christ becomes a good Samaritan to help the robbed.

This passage gave me comfort instead of a guilty conscience. This passage gave me hope instead of frustration. Why? Because there was no choice. I had to be identified with the person who was robbed. We are the ones beaten without knowing any reason. We are just traveling along this life and we are robbed all of a sudden. We are beaten harshly. We are here helpless, and that is why this text became a passage of comfort and new strength.<sup>51</sup>

In our Korean American community, there are many families who came here fifteen, ten years ago and now they have established one business, ready to go on, to move on, and all of a sudden it is completely burned down. They don’t know what to do the next day. And Jesus told us this parable. In all the parables of Jesus Christa there is anticipation of the kingdom of God through the life of Jesus Christ. So in this parable we see that Jesus himself is the true good Samaritan. I didn’t realize that before, but in this passage the Lord is just doing the same thing as the good Samaritan. As I was crying out to the world, as I was identifying myself with this robbed man, I suddenly realized that the good Samaritan was Jesus Christ himself, and this message all of a sudden turned to become a message of comfort and strength and hope.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p.19

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

In Yung's identification, Koreans American became "the ones beaten without knowing any reason." Then, Yung said that he was comforted by the identification with the victims because Jesus Christ, "the good Samaritan," would take the side of the victims of this riot.

Another instance of a similar metaphor to Yung's is found in an essay by Reverend Hee-Min Park, who was the second senior pastor of Youngnak. Park made a clear line between the victims of the riot and the others. Based on the scripture about the mourning of the Israelites when Babylon ruined Israel, he made an analogy between Korean Americans and the Israelites attacked by the Babylonians.

Remember, O LORD, what has happened to us;  
Look and see our disgrace.  
Our inheritance has been turned over to aliens,  
Our homes to foreigners. (Lamentations 5:1-2)

As the Babylonian forces burned, robbed and humiliated Jerusalem long ago, we experienced pains, the sense of despondency, the feeling of betrayal when we witnessed our dreams built with our sweat, blood and tears were burned to ashes in one night. However, we should stop continuing to get angry, be discouraged, feel sad or reproach ourselves. Now is the time for us to heal our wounded body and mind and to rebuild our dream and vision on the ashes.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Rev. Park, Hee-min. "4.29 reul Gyeok-kko Naseo (After Experiencing The April 29 Riot)" *Hanmaeum*, 1992. 5. Vol. 24. p.2 At Youngnak, more than thirty families were victims of the riot, including the family of Jae-Sung (Edward) Lee who was killed during the riot.

In Park's metaphor, Korean Americans were the Israelites attacked by the Gentile Babylonians which were African Americans in this case. He established a group identity which is both Korean and Christian against non-Korean groups considered to be non-Christians, Gentiles. However, Park's metaphor decontextualized the pains of the Israelites after the attack of the Babylonians in the Bible in the book of Jeremiah. The historical context of Jeremiah in the Bible is that God punished the Israelites for their disobedience. Park emphasized only the aspect that the Israelites suffered from the oppression by the outsiders regardless of what caused this suffering. Then, Park established boundaries between Korean Americans and non-Koreans based on Christian identity as God's chosen people. Therefore, Park established a God's Chosen People-Gentiles framework in interpreting the relationship between Korean Americans and non-Korean ethnic groups.

This dichotomy is more clearly presented in the missionary narrative. An assistant pastor Hyeon-Su Han at Youngnak viewed non-Koreans as their mission fields, calling them "Gentiles," a term contrasted with Gods' Chosen people.

We have lived in the center of Koreatown too long. However, the Riot taught us that we can survive this society by living together with people of other ethnicity and we can take deep roots in American society. The same is applied to the case of church. Churches cannot substantially perform their functions and survive without building relationships with numerous dying Gentiles in our neighborhoods. Generally speaking, even businesses have to run deep into American society for future success. Much more do the churches. How can the churches expand without evangelizing other ethnic groups, considering that churches are responsible for spreading the gospel to the Gentiles? Therefore, Korean immigrant churches should be mission-oriented. Based on God' Providence to tell us to leave our homeland for LA, I

believe that God is ordering us to evangelize everyone around the world and He wants us to live prosperously in this rich country. <sup>54</sup>

According to Han, the riot “taught” Korean Americans that there were “people of other ethnicity” who are “Gentiles.” Han used the term “Gentiles” in referring to non-Koreans. Therefore, Korean American Christians interpreted the riot as conflict between the believers and the Gentiles who do not follow God’s way. These narratives illustrate the constitution of ethnocentric self-esteem based on their Christian identity within Korean American Christian leaders.

As seen in the above two cases, Korean American Christians have established their identity as victims as a factor of their ethnic solidarity. At the same time, this victimization narrative established the boundary of being Koreans contrasted with non-Koreans.

The following testimony of a riot victim at Youngnak illustrates this group solidarity as both Korean and Christian against non-Korean groups.

I was indentured by God as His child. I believe that they(African Americans) plundered me because we own more than they do. Aren’t those who give better than those who receive? I feel joyful and peaceful, finding that I always have greater love from God than them.<sup>55</sup>

By saying that she was “indentured by God as His child,” deacon Seong Sil Jeong proclaimed her identity as “His child” indentured by God and African American

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<sup>54</sup> Rev. Han, Hyeon-Su. “Immigrant Churches and Missionary Work” *Hanmaeum*. 1994. December. Vol. 49. p23.

<sup>55</sup> Jeong, Seong-Sil. “Apeumeul Jipgo Ireoseomyeo (Facing and Overcoming Pain)” *Hanmaeum*. 1992. 6. 28.(41) p. 6

“plundered” because of their jealousy of His blessing. Therefore, Jeong could stand the suffering and thanked God for “greater love.” To her, an arrogant Christian identity is incorporated into Korean identity based on common experiences as the riot victims and drew distinction from non-Koreans, African Americans in this case. Korean American Christians utilized Christian identity as a factor of Korean American identity through the riot and afterward.

The following testimony of another victim, deacon Mi-Seon Lee at Youngnak understood the riot as part of His plan for Koreans in America.

Oh, God! Are you watching us? Why did you call us to this land? We know everything is within your Providence but what is your plan now? Didn't you cause us to be born in the South of a small country and be uprooted from the place we lived? We came here with our own dreams and plans. But we know that it was not by our decisions, but your guidance for us to come here. If we were in Korea, we could enjoy desk jobs or live comfortably without getting our hands wet from chores and have even a bottle of beer and a bunch of green onion being delivered from the market down stairs. However, you called us here and taught us the meaning of “toil and sweat” and what manual labor is like. We have spent years and years working hard even though we have been too busy to even talk about mental disease which is common here and too busy to wear make up or have our nails manicured. Oh, God, what is your plan for us living like that? What do you want us to learn from it? Do you want us to be stronger? Do you want us to have stronger will? Do you want us to live in firm faith that everything is within your providential plan and You are watching us at the moment.....I see your sons and daughters who thank You until they cry even in this hardship. I see those who worship you in this painful situation like this.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Lee, Mi-Seon. “Saworui Apeum.(The Pain on April): Sa-ee-gu Pokdongeul Jinamyeonseo (Going Through the April Riot)” *Hanmaeum*. 1992. 6. 28. Vol. 41. p.25.



Lee's rhetoric interprets the riot as a trial by God for His people. According to Lee's interpretation, God planned her immigration and all the hardships including the riot are part of His plan to make her a true Christian. They suffered from the LA Riot. However, through their identity as God's Chosen people, Lee rearticulate the tragedy as another expression of God's blessings which leads to their special missions toward "other ethnic groups." As in the case of Jeong above, Lee tended to transmit Christian identity into Korean ethnic solidarity and used it for distinguishing themselves from non-Koreans.

These Christian narratives are among the defensive reactions to the mainstream media's condemnation of Korean American merchants' racism toward African Americans as a cause of the riot. After the riot, the media established the Black-Korean conflict framework by continuously suggesting evidence of Koreans' contribution to the problem. After the riot, a Korean American woman complained about media's overemphasis on Du's incident saying, "over and over all they showed was the orange juice, again and again just the orange juice, nothing about how the girl grabbed her, and the hundreds of Koreans who have died," in the interview by John Lie and Nancy Abelmann.<sup>57</sup>

Even if it is hard to deny the existence of Korean American prejudices toward African Americans, most Korean Americans believed that all they did was to open their businesses in African American neighborhood and work hard. As a

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<sup>57</sup> Lie, John and Nancy Abelmann. "The 1992 Los Angeles Riots and the 'Black-Korean Conflict'" Kim, Kwang Jung ed. *Koreans in the Hood: Conflict with African Americans*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press. 1999:75-87. p.82.

defensive reaction, Korean American Christians used the Christian concept of tribulations of God's chosen people for comforting themselves. Even if they sinned, God still cares about His people.

In addition, Korean American Christian leaders provide consoling narratives to emphasize White American racism as a cause of the riot. According to Reverend Chan-Hie Kim, an emeritus professor at Claremont School of Theology, "Sinful human nature violated the dignity of African Americans. They challenged the sin of the European American Groups' egoism that threw down the dignity of African Americans."<sup>58</sup> Rev. Kim thought that Korean Americans were scapegoats of the sins of racial majority group in America and low economic status of African Americans due to the American racism.

In the same article, Kim provided answers to question, "Why was it Korean Americans?" during the riot. As a Christian leader, Kim intended to comfort Korean Americans by arguing that this riot had nothing to do with what Korean Americans have done.

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<sup>58</sup> Korean American community leaders initiated an organization for the riot victims, The April 29 Association under the leadership of Sa Il Hong. This organization helped the victims obtain assistance from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and loans from the Small Business Administration.(SBA). In addition, the organization distributed over eleven million dollars in relief funds from the Korean government and the overseas Korean communities as well as Korean Americans in other states. Hong published a book about the Los Angeles Riot titled *Victorious Out of the Ashes* in both Korean and English. The book contains the testimonies of Korean American victims, stories of Korean community leaders, and scholarly essays of Korean American scholars and theologians. This book republished the article that Reverend Chan-Hie Kim wrote two years after the riot.

Kim, Chan-Hie "The Biblical Perspectives on the 4.29 Riot and the Korean American Community." in Lee, Samuel, ed. *The Most Tragic Incident in 100-Year History of the Korean Americans: Victorious Out of the Ashes*. Los Angeles: The April 29 Association. 2003. p.169.

As one analyses the causes of the 4.29 riot from the above perspectives, one can realize that Korean Americans were innocent victims. Korean Americans suffered massive damages unfairly because they were close to the area of African Americans and had a lot of businesses in the areas of African Americans. It is not that God punished Korean Americans since they are more immoral than other races. Moreover, it is not either that because many Korean Americans had liquor businesses, God punished them, as some people contemplate. It is only that we were at the wrong time and at the wrong place in the early stage of emigration. This is only an accidental event that we met.<sup>59</sup>

Then, Rev. Kim's blame went to European Americans who caused economic disparities along the racial lines.

Kim's Biblical interpretation of the riot illustrates how Korean American Christians constitute meaning of being Korean Americans as God's chosen people through their religious faith. According to Kim's interpretation, Korean Americans are a God's chosen people brought to the present Canaan and the LA Riot in 1992 was "a tragedy in the process of settlement in Canaan."<sup>60</sup> Kim said:

God brought Koreans to the United States, the land flowing with milk and honey. We the immigrants are the people who live in God's Promised Land. "And I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusite" (Exodus 3:8.) This Promised Land can be also the territory of the United States, to which God led the Korean People.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p.172.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p.180.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p.177-178..

The United States is the beautiful, vast, and the so-called land flowing with milk and honey. This soil is the land that God promised to Abraham, the ancestor of Israel, long time ago (Genesis 26:3-5; 28:4;35:12). Until Israel entered the Promised Land, they lived as slaves for several centuries and continued to wander in the wilderness. However, God kept his promise and finally led them to Canaan, the Promised Land. As Isaac, the son of Abraham to you and to your descendants with you, that you may take possession of the land of your sojourning which God gave to Abraham” (Genesis 28:4).

Although we live as strangers in this country, will we see someday the day in which we live as natives because God’s promise is everlasting. We try to understand the 4.29 riot in this context of faith.<sup>62</sup>

In Kim’s interpretation, in the context of pilgrimage, Korean Americans are in the wilderness on the way to Canaan as “strangers.” However, Kim emphasized the faith in God’s promise to give the Promised Land to His people. Kim also emphasized the faith that God will keep the promise to give His people the land of milk and honey, Canaan. In Kim’s metaphor, Korean American Christians have come to “the land of milk and honey” which should be America, as seen in his statements: “We the immigrants are the people who live in God’s Promised Land.” Then the riot becomes God’s trials to His people before settling in the Promised Land. In this sense, Kim said that Korean Americans made progress in fulfilling His plan, through this crisis.

Kim continued to interpret the riot as part of God’s providential plan by using the analogy between the riot and the Israelites in the Bible who struggled with the native Canaan tribes. Kim explained what the Israelites experienced once they entered Canaan. Kim applied an analogy of the United States with Canaan in

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<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p.178.

the Bible to the incident of the riot. In the Bible, Canaan was the land where the native people already resided before the Israelites, God's chosen people moved there. According to Kim, the Israelites did not just enter and settle in Canaan, rather they sacrificed themselves for conquering the land and settling in. Therefore, Kim interpreted the tragic experience of the LA Riot as another piece of evidence of God's selection of Korean Americans as His people. In his article, Kim confirmed that Korean Americans are the people who received His promise.

What we should remember is that the people of Israel did not receive their Promised Land without any difficulty. The land was not automatically bestowed with peace. It was the reality that they fought a lot with the natives of Canaan and had many conflicts. Although God promised Israel to give them the land of Canaan, they had to fight many battles and had to spill much blood till they completely settled down in that place. When we see the April 29 Riot in the context of prolonged history, it can be seen as an event that occurred in the process of settlement. ....We should note that the settlement of Canaan was not accomplished all of a sudden, but it was achieved by the long gradual process of hundreds of years. When the people of Israel were starving and had difficulty in wilderness, they yearned for the slavery life in Egypt, blamed Moses, and disobeyed God. As soon as they escaped Egypt, they did not enter Canaan all at once. They entered God's Promised Land after many generations..... Until they took root deeply into the land of Canaan, God gave them trials, and they became a strong nation through these ordeals <sup>63</sup>.

Kim applied the Biblical incidents to those of Korean Americans in the present day. In this sense, the riot became "an event that occurred in the process of settlement," not God's punishment.

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<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 178-179

I understand that the 4.29 riot is not God's punishment, but a trial given by the loving God. I would like to understand that through the 4.29 riot God taught us how to settle down in the United States, which is composed of many ethnic groups and races. God did not create this incident. We have come to realize what it means to live together in peace and come to know better this Promise Land through the 4.29 riot.<sup>64</sup>

This rhetoric interpreting the riot as a trial by God for His People serves to provide as a factor to distinguish Korean Americans from Koreans. As Elaine Kim said, the LA Riot served as a "baptism" for them to become Americans distinguishing Korean Americans from Koreans.<sup>65</sup>

The LA Riot was a crisis in which multiethnic relations were involved. Korean Americans were shocked without knowledge of multiracial conflicts in American society. They brought the prejudicial attitudes toward African Americans and frequent contact with poor African Americans convinced them of their prejudices. Even if the racism of Korean Americans actually exists and were partly responsible for the riot, the status of Korean Americans as another minority group against a bigger giant, European American racism, motivated Korean Americans to feel that they were victims of the racial conflicts in Los Angeles. Therefore, the views presented among the Korean American Christians were both resistant and defensive. The rhetoric of Korean American Christians identifying themselves as

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<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p.179..

<sup>65</sup> Korean American scholar, Elaine Kim, interpreted this riot as an incident for Korean immigrants to become truly involved in American society, saying "What they experienced on April 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> was a baptism into what it really means for a Korean to "become American" in the 1990s." Kim, Elaine H. "Home Is Where the *Han* Is: A Korean American Perspective on the Los Angeles Upheavals" in Wu, Jean Yu-Wen Shen & Min Song. *Asian American Studies: A Reader*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press. 2000. p.273

God's Chosen people confirmed their chosen-ness by receiving "a trial given by the loving God." Furthermore, this riot resulted in memories that only Korean Americans can share.

Korean American Christian interpretations within the rhetoric of God's chosen-ness views Korean Americans as innocent victims. Then, Korean American Christians rearticulate the tragedy as another expression of God's blessings and His plan for better lives, by teaching them how to settle in America, His Promised Land. In conclusion, by utilizing Christian narratives, "most Korean American churches went back into their "comfort zone" of providing emotional and psychological healing, individual salvation, and/or working to increase attendance in their own congregations.," as Edward Taehan Chang, a professor of ethnic studies at the University of California, Riverside noted.<sup>66</sup>

## **B. The Second Puritans**

Through the riot, Korean Americans paid price for realizing that they were one of the minority groups in American society and vulnerable to interethnic conflicts. Before they came to America, Koreans were members of the majority group in Korea. However, in a multiethnic environment, they need to identify themselves in relationship with others. Therefore, what it means to be "us" is defined according to who we belong to and who we do not. The maintenance of

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<sup>66</sup> Chang, Edward Taehan "The Post-Los Angeles Riot Korean American Community: Challenges and Prospects" in Lee, Samuel, ed. *Op., Cit.*, p.157

boundaries in America is somewhat complex because there are layers of social structures based on racial and ethnic differences.

Here I will analyze how Korean American Christians use their Christian backgrounds in creating a boundary between themselves and other ethnic groups and in particular, how they gain a sense of what it means to be American by connecting to Puritan tradition, “a vaguely defined concept of mainstream or dominant culture”<sup>67</sup>

Puritanism was one of the main characteristics of American missionaries to Korea. Puritan factors of American missionaries influenced Korean Christians in terms of their religious life styles and Christian ethics. In addition to their religious aspects, Korean Christians naturally accepted the orthodoxy that Americans were descendents of the *Mayflower* Puritans and that they came to America for religious freedom. As a way to establish a connection to American identity, Korean American Christians utilized the myth of American Puritans as models for them to emulate and applied Puritan identity directly to the identities of Korean immigrants based on the fact that they immigrated to the country of Puritans and their religion is based on Puritan doctrines and traditions.

The Korean religious leaders tend to regard American Puritans in the seventeenth century as models of the lives and identities of desirable Americans. In Korean Christians’ imagination, they were sincere Christians, hard workers, people

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<sup>67</sup> Moore, R. Laurence. *Religious Outsiders and the Making of Americans*. New York: Oxford University Press. 1986. p.xi.



of moral purity and the first to celebrate Thanksgiving. In addition, the myth and ideal of American Puritans influenced Korean American attitudes toward other minority groups. Koreans' inheritance of the position of American Puritans based on their religious homogeneity provides distinctiveness from other minority groups in America as well as from white Americans who lost the Puritan spirit. The New England Puritans who disappeared hundreds of years ago were resurrected in the body of Korean American Christians.

An associate pastor at Younknak Rev. Deok-Weon Ahn wrote an essay entitled "God for Immigrants" in *Hanmaeum*, a church magazine. Ahn juxtaposed the American Puritans with Abraham and Jacob in the Bible, saying that they were immigrants for religious freedom in modern history. In the following quote, American Puritans answered to God's calling like Abraham and Jacob in the Bible.

In the Bible, we find that the first immigrant was Abraham. The second one would be Jacob who left home for Egypt with all his 70 family members. In modern history, it was the Puritans on the *Mayflower* who crossed the Atlantic Ocean for religious freedom and arrived at Plymouth Rock in 1620.<sup>68</sup>

Then, Ahn emphasized on the success and prosperity of American Puritans because of their sincere faith in God by comparing America, a country of Puritans, with South American countries which are poor relative to America.

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<sup>68</sup> Rev. Ahn, Deok-Weon. "Iminjaui Hananim (God for Immigrants)" *Hanmaeum*. 1998. 9. 27. Vol. 61:4-6. p.4

The faith of the Puritans who immigrated to America is really precious. Because we are also living in America, a country of Puritans, it is even more meaningful to appreciate their faith. The Puritans came to America only for God. They came for religious freedom, not for gold. While the people who went to South America for gold gained neither gold nor God, the Puritans who sought God obtained both gold and God. It is natural that their descendents have become a leading power now in the world. Then, I wish you may follow the Puritans' faith and enjoy God's blessing as immigrants. It is certain that God blesses the immigrants who seek Him and their descendents. In this time, I want to ask you, Christians, whether your faith has been deepened since immigrating to America. If not, you should reflect on Puritan lives and renew your faith.<sup>69</sup>

Ahn emphasized that the American Puritans immigrated only for God and religious freedom while the South Americans immigrated for Gold. Then, Ahn said that America became a leading country in the current age because of the faith of the Puritans in the seventeenth century. Ahn compared South America with the United States saying that "the Puritans who sought God" gained wealth as well as religious freedom unlike "the people who went to South America for gold" who gained nothing. Ahn tried to make his interpretation persuasive to the reader by giving historical fact as evidence of God's blessing. However, Ahn's comparison is not correct because historically, Spanish Catholics also went to South Korea for evangelization and they were very active in evangelization. Therefore, Ahn's interpretation is based on his prejudice against Hispanics and Catholics. Ahn did not use racial terms, but his interpretation implies that he views America as a country of Puritans who Koreans believe were racially Anglo-Saxon while South Americans are "Hispanics." Then, Ahn presented his wish to be associated with

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<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p.6

American Puritans, persuasively saying “I wish you may follow the Puritans’ faith and enjoy God’s blessing as immigrants.”

In description of the Puritan lives, Ahn created imagined images of their sincere Christian lives which were overlapped with Korean Christians.

Every morning when the morning sun light shone on the houses, Puritans prayed to God for fresh air, warm sunlight, and a comfortable night with all the families together. Also every evening, they thanked Him. They kept Sunday worship, attended bible classes, and had fellowship with people. Their religious faith enabled them to win over human evil greed and to obey God’s sovereignty in their lives.

Puritans gave glory to God and became the most desirable Christians. They believed that they should do their best to be the best husbands, the best wives, the best children, and the best servants, in order to glorify God.

Puritans lived thoroughly with God in their hearts. Like them, I wish you may live immigrant lives centered on Jesus Christ, who is the God of Abraham, Jacob, the Puritans, and immigrants like us.<sup>70</sup>

In his portrayal of Puritans, Ahn used familiar Korean Christians’ images like praying in the morning, keeping the Sunday worship, and attending small group bible studies, which were not authentic reflection of American Puritans. In particular, morning prayer is one of the representative characteristics of Korean Protestantism influenced by morning meditation in Buddhism. Furthermore, he emphasized family values, upon which Koreans placed their priority. Ahn’s images of Puritans are overlapped with those of Korean Christian lives. Therefore, Ahn’s

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<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

description created interchangeable images of Korean Christians and the American Puritans in New England in the seventeenth century.

An evangelist (*Jeondasa*<sup>71</sup> in Korean) Il-Young Moon, further clarified the racial backgrounds of the American Puritans saying “They were the Anglo-Saxon Puritans, Pilgrim Fathers aboard the *Mayflower* when it landed on Plymouth Rock” in his essay titled “American Puritanism and Korea.” Like Ahn, Moon attributed the current superior status of America in global relations to God’s blessings on the Puritan spirits and their morality. According to Moon, Puritan spirits were the core virtues for Americans and it was Anglo-Saxon Puritans who made America “heaven on earth.” Moon found a reason that America has become so rich and powerful in God’s blessing on the descendents of the Puritans.

The reason why America has been a global leader in every aspect including military, economy and morality was because of the Puritan spirit.

Some Puritans came to America escaping from oppression in 1620. They were the Anglo-Saxon Puritans, Pilgrim Fathers aboard the *Mayflower* when it landed on Plymouth Rock. The Pilgrim Fathers poured all their energy into making America “heaven on earth” based on Puritanism.....They believed in God from all their hearts and their purpose in life was to live by God’s Will.<sup>72</sup>

Moon’s remark reveals his assumption of America as a country of “white” Puritans. Moon’s remarks show that the images of America held by the Puritans as a “heaven on earth” both endures and changes. Moon said that America is in danger and the

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<sup>71</sup> In Korean churches, *Jeondosa* refers to people who are not officially ordained as pastors.

<sup>72</sup> Moon, Il-Young. “Migui Cheong-gyo-do Jeongshinkwa Hanguk (American Puritanism and Korea) *Youngnak News* 1992. 11. Vol. 30. p.16-17

solution to this is to restore the spirit of the American Puritans. The role of Koreans in America is to be the present Puritans in America. Moon criticized American society for its moral decay and atheism.

God blessed America. When America was founded, how many wrong things did they do which could not please God? However, as God made the Israelites foundations of God's blessing to all other nations and races, He chose America as the cornerstones of His blessings. He blessed America in every way such as military power, and economic wealth, then He used America an agent to deliver God's blessing to all the people in the world by showing the visions of world missions for all the nations that have not heard about the Gospel.

However, where is America now? They still send the largest number of missionaries abroad and they are keeping the Christian model as a chosen people in society as they give vows to God in courts or parliament. However, we can see that they are not living centered on God. Then, what can America do? Where should it go? It should repent. Repentance is the only way to go back to God. In the second book of Chronicles, chapter 7, verse 14, God said, "If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land." When the Israelites sinned and were away from God, God sent prophets and pleaded to them for repentance and gave punishment out of love. Today America should plead to God for recovery of this land through repentance.

Then, what are our roles as Koreans in this land? What is God's purpose to bless Koreans who have gone through hard histories under oppression by powers such as China, Russia, and Japan and have struggled to survive as a weak nation? In addition, what does the fact that churches are founded everywhere Koreans go, tell us? We have to answer the calling of God who blesses Koreans. We have to find God's big purposes, transcending nationalistic perspective. Through all the suffering in the wilderness, what is God's will for us who become His people in this land as immigrants?

We have to stand against this decaying and corrupted America. We have to serve roles as prophets for God who cried for the repentance of His people for healing this land. We have to keep God's hearts in our minds. We have to keep the voices to cry out. We have to become prophets like Elijah who was crying for His people. For taking this calling, I think we can revive the

Puritan spirit by being real Puritans in this land who lived centered on God and pleased God.<sup>73</sup>

The critique of American society and the calling of special missions of Korean Christians promote particular group cohesion of Korean Americans. Moon put universal Christian identity into a particular Korean ethnicity by saying that God blessed Koreans because they have gone through “hard histories” which were evidence of God’s trials. Then, Moon pointed out the growth of Korean ethnic churches in America as another evidence of God’s special purpose to bring Koreans to America.

Moon established Korean American images as “prophets for God” against “this decaying and corrupted America.” In fulfilling their missions as prophets, Moon claimed that Korean Americans should follow in the footsteps of the American Puritans, saying that “we can revive the Puritan spirit by being real Puritans in this land who lived centered on God and pleased God.” Based on Moon’s narrative, Korean Christians, as a group who received special hard training through their difficult histories, have a duty to inherit and transform Puritan traditions and purify America.

In Moon’s concept of Korean Americans as the second Puritans, he conflated Christian identity into Korean ethnic group solidarity and defined their American identity as Korean-faced American Puritans. This Puritan narrative

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<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

reflects Korean Americans' intention not to be identified with other minority groups and to resist their marginal status in America.

In the following quote, Rev. Chungil Yang refused common identity even with Asian Americans based on the large number of Korean American Christian Churches. Yang wrote this under the theme of the roles of Korean American Christians in the new century. Yang used mission-oriented narratives which are popular among evangelical Christians:

The second reason is the spiritual awakening of America. Unlike the Chinese and the Japanese immigrants, Korean immigrants have prospered by being centered on Protestant Churches. Even though sometimes Korean American churches have experienced their divisions and conflicts in some areas, we believe that God has called us to the missions for restoring the falling American churches and for awakening this spiritually dark society because He helped us to develop our churches in America.<sup>74</sup>

According to Yang, Korean Americans are different because they have “prospered by being centered on Protestant churches” while the Chinese and the Japanese have not. Yang used Christian identity as a factor to establish Korean American identity as a separate racial group, rejecting Asian American racial identity. As mentioned before, for Koreans, “Korean” refers not merely to a nationality but also to an independent race distinctive from other Asians such as the Japanese and the Chinese. Yang coalesced this typical Korean categorization of races and the uniquely dominant Christian background of Korean Americans for establishing their own identities. Therefore, for Korean American Christians, their special

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<sup>74</sup> Yang, Chungil. “God’s Plan for Korean American Churches at the twentieth century” *Hanmaeum*. Vol. 52. April. 1996. p. 18

identity as people who will inherit the role of the Puritans stands before Asian American identity.

In addition, Yang's visions of Korean Americans as missionaries implement his intention to promote American identity with Korean ethnic background.

The third one is the evangelization of the world, which we have considered as our mission since the early years of our churches. That is due to the following elements we have: the understanding and overcoming of poverty and suffering which we have inherited from our histories: the international perspective, fluency in English, and the possession of American citizenship which we have naturally obtained by living in America, the country which is empowering the world.<sup>75</sup>

Yang listed the reasons which give them missions for the evangelization of the world in two ways. First of all, Korean Americans have "the understanding and overcoming of poverty and suffering" that they have inherited as Koreans and secondly, they have "fluency in English" and "the possession of American citizenship" which they can obtain as Americans. Yang said that being Americans has privileges because America is a country which is "empowering the world."

Rev. Hee-Min Park, a second senior pastor at Younknak, also employed similar narratives with Rev. Yang. America is a powerful country and Korean American Christians are special.

The Korean American churches have to pursue creative ministries to accommodate to the transition of the society. There are many similarities between the cultures of the first century and today, the twenty first century. If

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<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*



I give a few examples, in the first century, the Roman culture controlled the world. Then, these days, the culture of English speaking countries is at the center of the world. Therefore, it is a great blessing for us to live in America and perform our ministries. Also this means that we have great missions. In the first century, the traditional values and order collapsed and the new ones did not replace them. We are in a very similar situation in that the traditional social order and values are collapsed and the new values and order are not established yet. Then in the first century, the early churches performed their ministries in multicultural societies and the cultural condition that Korean American churches face in the twenty first century is also multicultural.<sup>76</sup>

Rev. Park made an analogy between the Roman Empire in the first century and America in the twenty first century. As the Roman Empire was the most powerful entity at that time, Park said that the culture of “English speaking countries” is controlling the world. As a result, Park continued, it is “a great blessing” to carry out our religious lives “in America.” According to Park, living in a “English speaking country” is a sign that “we have great missions.” Furthermore, Park said “the traditional values and order,” by which he meant “the first Puritan Movement,” collapsed in America:

Most of all, recovering from the previous pain, we have to regain our roles as a church to share what we have, serve our neighbors, and evangelize the society. In addition, we have to participate actively in American society as well as the communities of other ethnic groups and to take our missions as a creative minority which evangelizes for the purification of America which has been corrupted. For this mission, we have to restore spirit of the first Puritan Movement in this country which has been corrupted and secularized.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Rev. Park, Hee-Min. “Secheonnyeon Seyeoksa (New Millenium and New History)” *Hanmaeum*. 2000. 4. 2. Vol. 67. p.2

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p.3

In Park's narratives, the identity as the second Puritans became a key factor in what it means to be Korean American Christians. Then, if Korean Americans are the second Puritans, the question is who the others are in America, and the answer is that they are non-Korean Americans who are not Christian enough to be the second Puritans.

The following comments by editors of *Youngnak News*, a church monthly magazine, reveal their attitudes toward their multiracial neighborhoods. Editors interpreted that God moved their church to "dangerous" and "poor" Hispanic neighborhoods for being "light and salt" in the neighborhoods.

There is a saying that there is no accident in the world. This is especially true in God's plan. God called us from Koreatown to this Hispanic neighborhood and we should keep it in our mind that this is not because there is no space in Koreatown.

Long ago, God called Abraham who was living a comfortable life and made him take a walk in the wilderness. This was all part of His plan. God moved us to their dangerous neighborhood of factories and poor Hispanic villages. Then, we have to cross the wall of the church following His commandments and take our jobs as light and salt in this neighborhood. We are leaders. In the twentieth century, we have to make the second jump to become a leader not only in the Korean American community but also in American mainstream society.<sup>78</sup>

Every thing they are doing is part of God's plan to put up Korean American as God's Chosen people who will lead the 21<sup>st</sup> century America. This sense of superiority as God's missionary consoles the minority status by establishing their

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<sup>78</sup> *Youngnak News*. 2001. 8. Vol. 134. p.1-2

identities above other minority groups as well as over white majority who are losing Puritan faith.

After the L.A. Riot, Korean American communities began to launch community activities toward their neighborhoods including Youngnak. Youngnak is leading a few ministries in the Los Angeles area. Among them, LOVE Tijuana is a church ministry in its neighboring city of San Diego which started in 1993 by the first generation and expanded to the second generation in 2003. In this ministry, the church members go to Tijuana on every second Saturday of the month and spend the whole day, working with a number of local churches. During the mission trip, they provide the local people with medical and dental services, food and beauty treatment as well as help in their worship services. The following testimony by a Korean American college student, Isaac Lee, reveals the sense of superiority toward people after he participated in this program.

Most people came with their children and many of the children looked unclean and malnourished. Their hair was unkempt and their clothes had layers of stains. When I started to take photographs on my digital camera, children got curious and they gathered around me. I saw their twinkling eyes which could not hold back their awe and their wonder as they stared at and listened to the clicking and whizzing of my little machine. Digital cameras have become common commodities in the United States but not in Mexico. The screen in the back of my camera, in particular, filled them with curiosity and thrilled their imagination. They wanted to be photographed and see themselves in the camera. I saw and admired their innocence from their simple and unsophisticated minds. Jesus said that man cannot enter the kingdom of heaven without first being like a child.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Lee, Isaac M. "Love Tijuana". *Hanmaeum*, 2003. 5. 25. Vol. 79. p.80

Lee described people in Tijuana as “unclean,” “malnourished,” “unkempt” and “layers of stains.” Children in Tijuana expressed innocent curiosity toward “little machines” which are common in the United States.

The following is another testimony by Grace Choi, a Korean American college student after the mission trip to Haiti.

Haitians gave and taught me more than I could ever give them. I was ashamed for the ungrateful hearts and attitudes in the States. I was like King Solomon with great riches compared with these people who barely got one meal a day. Haitian Christians had faith like Abraham. They didn’t know if there would be food or money to survive the next day, and yet they trusted God wholeheartedly to provide for them. They were like Apostle Paul, who was content in all kinds of situations, whether in rich or poor, in suffering or comfort. They praised like King David in the Psalms, worshipping God from the bottom of their souls. They were truly the Light and Salt for those many Haitian who were lost. I wondered if I had faith, passion and love for God as they did. Could others see me as Light and Salt? Why did I lack praise and thanksgiving in my daily walk? Why was I incredibly blessed with material goods in the U.S.? Many questions filled my mind. It was a trip that helped me to reflect on and examine my walk with God as well as my lifestyle.<sup>80</sup>

Grace Choi compared herself to “King Solomon with great riches.” Choi asked herself why she was “incredibly” blessed by living in the U.S. In Choi and Lee’s cases, they imply that they are Americans, people of a rich country and they establish their American identities through the missionary work to poor countries like Mexico and Haiti. These attitudes reflect on their attitudes toward other minority groups in America around their neighborhoods in the Los Angeles area.

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<sup>80</sup> Choi, Grace “Faith, Passion and Love for God in Haiti. A short term medical mission. Christianville.” *Hanmaeum*, 2003. 5. 25. Vol. 79. p.82

I will end up with introducing my personal experience with people who were involved in LOVE LA, one of the home ministries by Youngnak. LOVE LA is a ministry reaching out to downtown Skid Row in Los Angeles and provide the homeless people with worship service and food every Sunday. One summer Sunday in 2004, I went to observe LOVE LA with groups at Youngnak. Most were African Americans and some were Latinos. After serving hamburgers and helping worship service with them, I drove back to church with a few bilingual young adults. There was a woman who had a baby boy less than a year old. We chatted and talked about the people we met in Skid Row. Then she said, "I cannot bring my son here. You know. It's a sanitary problem. I cannot bring him to this environment. It's too dangerous." She was a wife of a pastor at Youngnak English Ministry and had been very active in this ministry for many years. I was interested in her comments and attitudes toward African Americans they just had served.

#### **IV. THE NEW GENERATION AND JESUS AWAKENING MOVEMENT FOR AMERICA**

##### **A. New Generation in Korean American community**

One of the characteristics of post-1965 Korean immigrants was that they came to America in family units. In the 1990s, many children of post-1965 immigrants grew up to adolescence and entered college. Unlike their parents who experienced downward mobility, limited social networks and related socio-

psychological problems, the second generation Korean Americans<sup>81</sup> have been Americanized. They speak fluent English and show high academic achievement in school and socioeconomic achievement.<sup>82</sup> This Americanized second generation Korean Americans expressed the distance from their parents' generation who still maintain Korean elements in their lifestyles and sometimes show authoritarian styles in raising their children.<sup>83</sup>

This generational gap influenced on Korean American ethnic churches. The second generation gradually leaves their parents' church which had been their church in their younger years. "Silent Exodus" is the commonly used term referring to the phenomenon that the second generation gradually withdrew from their parents' ethnic church.<sup>84</sup> According to *KoreAm Journal*, "about 70 percent of the

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<sup>81</sup> Generally, the second generation Korean Americans mean those who were born in America with immigrant parents. I will include 1.5 generation who were Korean born in Korea but came of age in America. For detail definition of 1.5 generation, refer to Park, Kyeyoung. "'I Really Do Feel I'm 1.5!': The construction of Self and Community by Young Korean Americans." in *Amerasia Journal* 25:1 (1999): 139-163

<sup>82</sup> Korean American second generations were represented as an example of "model minority" groups. Between 1984 and 1995, the numbers of Asian Pacific Americans enrolled in higher education institutions rose 104.5 percent, with comparable figures of 5.1 percent for whites, 37 percent for African Americans and 104.4 percent for Hispanics. Kibria, Nazli. "College and Notions of 'Asian Americans': Second-Generation Chinese and Korean Americans Negotiate Race and Identity." *Amerasia Journal* 25:1(1999):29-51. p.30.

<sup>83</sup> Kim, Kwang Chung. R. Stephen Warner. & Ho-Youn Kwon. "Korean American Religion in International Perspective." in Kim, Kwang Chung. R. Stephen Warner. & Ho-Youn Kwon ed. *Korean Americans and Their Religions: Pilgrims and Missionaries from a Different Shore*. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press. 2001. p.13.

<sup>84</sup> "It is 'exodus' because the number of second-generation Korean American exiting is 'staggering.' It is 'silent' because their exit is often unnoticed or not given serious attention within Korean churches." Chai, Karen J. "Beyond 'Strictness' to Distinctiveness" Kim, Kwang Chung. R. Stephen Warner. & Ho-Youn Kwon. ed. *Op. Cit.*:157-180. p.158.

first generation Koreans are affiliated with a Korean church, while some scholars estimate that only 20 percent of the second generation attend.”<sup>85</sup>

However, despite the statistically low attendance rate of the second generation Korean Americans, Christianity is still playing important roles in the second generation as well. As a reaction to this reality, Korean American churches have developed English Ministries targeting the second generations. Jim-Bob Park, a former senior pastor of Youngnak English ministry<sup>86</sup> explained why the second generation still attends the Korean ethnic church, saying “There’s a sense of family at a Korean American church that is hard to find anywhere else.” He continued, “About two-thirds of our newcomers are what we call prodigals. They were once in church growing up, went away for many year—usually in the college days after they leave home—and they’re coming back.”<sup>87</sup>

However, as sociologist Karen Chai argued, the second generations present different religious attitudes from their parents even though they stay around ethnic churches. According to Chai, “the second generation is less concerned with formal

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<sup>85</sup> Jang, Grace E. and Corina Knoll, “The Church Divide” *KoreAm Journal*. Dec. 2005. Vol 16 No. 12:60-71. p.68

<sup>86</sup> Youngnak English Ministry is one of the largest English-speaking ministries in Los Angeles with about 1,200 members. Youngnak English Ministry became an independent congregation from Korean Ministry(KM) in 2004. Jim-Bob Park, a former senior pastor of Youngnak EM contributed to this independence of EM from KM. He explained his motivations in the interview with *KoreAm Journal*. “People don’t feel it’s their church, but that its their parents’ church. We wanted to give the second generation a sense of ownership. As the saying goes, you don’t wash the rental car when you return it” *Ibid*.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid*.

structures and processes, and instead stresses Christian ethics and evangelism”<sup>88</sup>

Therefore, the second generations focus on their personal relationship with God and “born-again” experiences, rather than the affiliation with the congregation.

Evangelicalism has been a dominant characteristic of Korean Christianity since the early influence of American missionaries and continues in Korean American churches, interacting with American evangelical cultures. Korean American Christians are very evangelical, which means “those who have a specific mission to tell others about their faith with the hope of converting them to Christianity,” according to sociologist Elaine Ecklund’s definition.<sup>89</sup>

Religious sociologist Anthony Alumkal, also discussed the significant influence of “mainstream” American evangelical Christianity on Korean American second generations. Alumkal argued that the second generations were adopting the form of American evangelical institutions such as InverVarsity Christian Fellowship, Vineyard, and Campus Crusade for Christ in terms of contemporary open worship services, worship songs, Bible study guides and theological characteristics.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Chai, Karen. “Competing for the Second Generation: English-Ministry at a Korean Protestant Church.” Warner, R. Stephen, and Judith G. Wittner. ed. *Gatherings in Diaspora: Religious Communities and the New Immigration*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press. 1998: 295-331. p.308

<sup>89</sup> Ecklund, Elaine H. “‘us’ and ‘them’: The Role of Religion in Mediating and Challenging the ‘model minority’ and other Civic Boundaries.” *Ethnic and Racial Studies*. Vol. 28. No. 1. (January, 2003): 132-150. p.135

<sup>90</sup> Alumkal, Anthony W. *Asian American Evangelical Churches : Race, Ethnicity, and Assimilation in the Second Generation*. New York : LFB Scholarly Publishing LLC. 2003. p.41.



In addition to the theological character, the close affiliation of second generation college students in evangelical organizations reveals the influence of evangelicalism. Therefore, scholars of Asian Americans and their ethnic/racial identities have paid their attention to research of the active participation of second generation Asian American college students in evangelical Christian organizations.<sup>91</sup> They have focused how second generation Asian Americans have negotiated their identity conflicts between ethnic separatism and religious universalism.

Some research has focused primarily on the campus organizations for particular ethnic groups. For instance, Busto Rudy, a professor of religious studies, discussed Asian American Students' participation in evangelical Christian organizations within the context of model minority stereotype. According to Rudy, as model minority images have trapped Asian American students inside "a set of performance expectations," Asian American evangelicals also are stereotyped as "God's whiz kids," embracing "a religious version of model minority."<sup>92</sup> He also argued that Campus evangelical organizations satisfy model minority images of Asian American students by reinforcing "an upwardly mobile middle-class ethic."

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<sup>91</sup> Busto, Rudy V. "The Gospel According to the Model Minority?: Hazardous Interpretation of Asian American Evangelical College Students." *Amerasia Journal* 22:1 (1996):133-147; Park, Soyoung. "'Korean American Evangelical': A Resolution of Sociological Ambivalence among Korean American College Students." Carnes, Tony and Fenggang Yang, ed. *Asian American Religions: The Making and Remaking of Borders and Boundaries*. New York: New York University Press, 2004:182-294; Jeung, Russell. "Asian American Panethnic Formation and Congregational Cultures" Min, Pyong Gap & Jung Ha Kim, eds. *Religions in Asian America: Building Faith Communities*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2002:215-243.

<sup>92</sup> Busto, Rudy V. *Ibid.*, p.140.

Therefore, through the participation in these evangelical religious practices, Christian identity becomes a significant factor for second generation Korean Americans to establish their Korean American identity. As sociologist Soyoung Park noted, even if Korean American second generations feel distance from their parents' churches, "First- and second-generation relations are not just personal but symbolically and interactionally institutionalized."<sup>93</sup>

Christian churches still play central roles in both generations.<sup>94</sup>

Furthermore, mission-oriented evangelical Christianity provides the common ground to both generations. The foundation and development of a Jesus Awakening Movement for America(JAMA) illustrates how Korean American Christian leaders have facilitated evangelicalism for the maintenance of their Korean American identities for the next generation. The first generation Korean American founders proclaim that their motivations and goals of this organization are to raise the second generation Korean Americans to be global leaders who can revive Christianity in America. For this purpose, it is targeting the Korean Americans in higher education and in professional status

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<sup>93</sup> Park, Soyoung. *Op. Cit.*, p.193.

<sup>94</sup> More about the second generation Korean American participation in Protestant churches, refer to Kim, Kwang Chung. R. Stephen Warner. & Ho-Youn Kwon. ed. *Korean Americans and Their Religions: Pilgrims and Missionaries from a Different Shore*. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press. 2001; Min, Pyong Gap & Jung Ha Kim, ed. *Religions in Building Faith Communities*. New York: Altamira, 2002; Chong, Kelly H. "What it Means to Be Christian: The Role of Religion in the Construction of Ethnic Identity and Boundary Among Second-Generation Korean Americans." *Sociology of Religion*. 59. (Fall) : 259-286; Ecklund, Elaine H. *Korean American Evangelicals : New Models for Civic Life*. New York: Oxford University Press. 2007.

## **B. Jesus Awakening Movement for America (JAMA)**

In 1993, a few first generation professionals founded JAMA, a parachurch Protestant evangelical organization targeting Korean American English speaking generations as well as Korean immigrant generations. It is headquartered in the Los Angeles Koreatown and holds an annual national revival meeting during the summer and small regional conferences and prayer meetings irregularly.

The birth of JAMA traces back to a retreat in Arrowhead Springs Christian Conference Center in San Bernadino, California in October, 1993. John C(Choon-Geun) Kim, a president of JAMA, testified that he saw a vision in his dream that the whole land of America was burning like forest fires and the Grace from Heaven filled the burned land. Motivated by this dream, Kim went to a retreat with other five Korean American Christian leaders and they shared their concerns about the future of America.<sup>95</sup> JAMA's official homepage described the birth of JAMA as "It was there that the Holy Spirit overwhelmingly convicted them to launch a nationwide Jesus awakening movement. Humbly accepting this awesome challenge, they put their complete faith and trust in God the Almighty."<sup>96</sup>

JAMA is promoting a special sense of group identity and unity for both generations. For the first generation, the idea of JAMA provides their children with the safe zone within religious society as "God's Whiz Kids." For the second

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<sup>95</sup> Kim, John C. *Hanbeon Saneun Insaeng Eotteoke Sal Geosinga( How will you live your life?)* Norwalk, California: Peter's House. 2003. p.163.

<sup>96</sup> <http://www.jamaglobal.com/wp/>

generation, this evangelical gathering is a place to proclaim their Christian identity which transcends the two antagonistic identities as Koreans and Americans. In addition, JAMA provided a route to participate in religious faith and practices outside the first generation centered ethnic churches which have been less attractive to the second generation, but to stay within Korean American boundaries.

The religious narrative of the founders of JAMA illustrate the identity formation as Americans with Korean heritage. Through an examination of the ideas of John C. Kim, the current president of JAMA, I will discuss the process of establishing American identity through the integration of Korean ethnic identity and Christian identity.

### **C. John C. Kim**

Dr. John C.(Chungeun) Kim is a professor of International Business and Management at the School of Business at California State University Monterey Bay. He was born in the southern part of Korea in 1939 during the period of the Japanese colonization. He became a Christian in his first year of high school. After he graduated from college in Seoul, he came to America for his graduate studies in 1967. He recalled the motivation for his studies in America in an interview with *Encounter*, a monthly journal by JAMA Ministries.

I wanted to know why America was so powerful. I wanted to investigate and research and examine the reason for its success. When I left Korea in 1967, Korea was very poor. It was under a military dictatorship. It was still in a very shaky situation. When I was a university student, Korea's per capita GDP was only \$87. That was life. I wanted to see how such a small country like Korea, especially a divided country, who depended so much on the U.S.A., would be able to survive with the help of America.<sup>97</sup>

He is a typical post-1965 Korean immigrant who experienced Korea's post-war poverty and who left Korea for his better education. He received his Ph.D. in American Government at University of Southern California in 1975 and he started his first teaching job at Pepperdine University in the same year. He was quite a competent professor and received the Teacher of the Year Award in the next year. However, soon after he settled in his new career, he found that he was seriously ill with a terminal liver problem. According to his testimony, God's grace completely healed him and the sickness became a turning point in his spiritual life.<sup>98</sup> In 1980, Kim moved to Alaska claiming God urged him to do so. He taught at University of Alaska for 16 years and came to California in 1997.

Kim called himself "Joseph in America." Kim said, "I overcame several near death experiences. Why did God save me from death? Joseph was sold to Egypt as a slave. Egypt was the most powerful country at that time. We are here in America, the center of the twentieth century even though we are not slaves."<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> This interview first appeared in *Encounter*, monthly journal by JAMA Ministries, in April 2006.

<sup>98</sup> Based on his testimony, after Kim knew about his disease, he went to the Bear Spring mountain and earnestly prayed to God for healing. There he experienced repentance and healing by God's Grace. He recalled that he wrote down the 52 page long list of his sins. After that experience, the disease was gone. He testified this episode in each of his speeches and books.

<sup>99</sup> <http://www.jamaprayers.com/wp/10158/>

“Joseph” is a Biblical figure who was appointed as viceroy even if he was a foreigner in Egypt. In Kim’s identification of himself with Joseph in Egypt, he implied that he made it in America which he think is the most powerful country in the present time, by becoming a professor, one of the high-status professions. Kim’s personal background influenced one of the characteristics of JAMA of focusing on the Korean American groups who are affiliated with high degree education and in professional careers. In the interview, Kim said, “There are more than 3,000 (Korean American) professors at American universities. The purpose of this movement is to give visions to them so that they can be leaders full of spiritual power in every field.”<sup>100</sup>

Like the pastors quoted above, Kim also repeated the concept of the second Puritan in establishing Korean American identities and included the second generation Korean Americans in this process.

Oh God! Why did you send Koreans to America in this evil time and why did you let Koreans be born and grow in America?

As a result of the consistent dedications and prayers of Korean pastors of Korean immigrant churches despite all the hard situations around them, there are more than 3,500 Korean ethnic churches in America. There is no race like Koreans who are living centered on Church except the Puritans. Korean pastors have emphasized that Korean Americans should be the second Puritans through their sermons. It is not just a dream. I firmly believe that this is the vision God showed Korean Americans. Therefore, I am sure that JAMA is our mission for this time for the spiritual revival of America.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Lee, Jun-Yeol. Interviews with John Kim at Dallas. posted in. <http://www.jamaprayers.com/wp/10087/>

In Kim's question above, "Koreans" who were "born and grow in America" meant the second generation Korean Americans. In the quote above, Kim said that both generations are the same "race" in that they are actively participating in evangelical Christianity. Then, Kim distinguished Korean Americans from other ethnic groups except the American Puritans: "There is no race like Koreans who are living centered on Church except the Puritans."

In each of his speeches and writings, "the spiritual revival of America" means getting America back to Puritan faith. Taking his ideas, Korean American Christian newspaper *Christian USA* introduced JAMA as a spiritual movement for the revival of America, "a country which started based on Puritan faith and is now departing from God."<sup>102</sup> Therefore, in the process of launching JAMA, Kim established Korean American identities as the second Puritan through their dedication to Christianity.

According to Kim, the Christian identity is a key factor in Korean identity and these Church-centered Korean Americans will be the second Puritan in this "evil time" of America.

God has not turned away from our race at all which has gone through five thousand years' history bearing the greatest amount of pain and hardship, and *han* in the history of the world. In these days leading up to the end of the world, God made Korea and all the Koreans spreading out to more than 170 nations acknowledge and see His vision toward our race. God forcefully cleaned all my blood, pain and *han* through the blood of Jesus Christ. My past has died and I, who was born-again through Jesus Christ, received His vision

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<sup>101</sup> Kim, John C. *Op.Cit.*, p.232-233.

<sup>102</sup> *Christian USA*. 2007. 1. 13.

and God enabled me to see His concrete wishes of His toward me and our race. What a great plan He has! I want to share God's longing wish from His deep heart toward this generation with you believers.<sup>103</sup>

According to Kim, God trained Koreans through "five thousand years' history bearing the greatest amount of pain and hardship," and sent them to America for fulfilling God's plan. Their religious missions for America develop their American identity.

JAMA Declaration for America written by JAMA founders including John Kim illustrates the narratives for Korean American Christians to express their American national identity based on their Christian faith.

America is our country where one million and five hundred thousand Korean Americans are staying.

America has received countless blessings from God because it was founded based on the Bible.

Despite those tremendous blessings from God, the current America became one of the most sinful countries in the world by abandoning God.

America is now under the influences of fatal sins

Those sins will lead to the inevitable fall of America.

America has to repent the sins of the nation and each individual and come back to God.

We feel responsible for the moral and spiritual awakening of America for the sake of Jesus Christ.

Let's long for God to heal this land, America by the way that we love America and its people.

We adopt this declaration in this American historic Independence Day.

Americans, let's declare the glory of God to the world and declare God's mighty actions among all the people.

We declare the liberation of America from atheism.

America, let's confess our sins and repent before the living God.

Let's declare the love of Jesus Christ for America.

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<sup>103</sup> Kim, John C. *Hananimui Sowoneul Irugi Wihayeo (The Cry from the Heart for Fulfilling God's Wish)* Norwalk, California: Peter's House. 2003. p.6



America, let's return to our previous love for Jesus Christ at once.  
We declare complete reconciliation among all the races for America.  
America, let's rekindle brotherhood within the love of Jesus Christ.  
We declare victory for America through the help of the power of God.  
America, let's devote everything to our almighty God.  
We declare our devotion to living by His words for America.  
America, let's obey God's will.

#### **D. JAMA Ministry: Global Leadership Development Institution (GLDI)**

Global Leadership Development Institution(GLDI) is one of the ministries by JAMA. It is a 40 days' intensive training program for the second generation Korean Americans in high education and professional careers. The first GLDI started in 2007 in Vanguard University of Southern California and 96 participated in it.

Dr. Daniel Park, one of the faculty members of GLDI, defined "the destiny God has for you(the second generation Korean Americans)" to be global leaders in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Then, Park encouraged their bilingual and bicultural backgrounds for this purpose as well as their evangelical Christian faith, "fervent faith in the cross of Jesus Christ."

You know in America, there are a lot of challenges we are facing in the 21th century.  
One of those greatest challenges among these challenges,  
perhaps the greatest challenge may be leadership crisis, leadership challenge  
The twenty first century requires and demands different kinds of leadership  
Global leaders who can understand multiple perspectives, multiple cultural  
orientations and (who) has fervent faith in the cross of Jesus Christ and love  
for the world the entire world not only my nation but the entire world  
God so loved the world and gave us his beloved son

Because of the Christ, some people have risen up to this challenge and create this program called Global Leadership Development Institution.  
The very purpose is to raise up global leaders in the 21<sup>st</sup> century who will shape new histories for Christ in this nation as well as beyond the nations, many many nations  
One of the unique identities God has given to us is this.  
Dual natures, bilingual nature, bicultural nature  
Both being Asian and Americans  
Both being Eastern and Western  
God has given us this dual gift for us to use to serve this nation in this global context  
So, those of you who have this multicultural orientation who grew up as an Asian and an American, this is for you.  
Come and be part of this great thing God is doing for 21<sup>st</sup> century to be global leaders for Christ  
We have committed ourselves to join you and help you, work with you to fulfill the destiny God has for you. <sup>104</sup>

What does it mean by “global leaders” in their senses? First of all, from their perspectives, they are people who achieved academic and professional success in foreign lands with their Christian faith. The following minimum qualifications of the applicants of this program reflect this definition.

Admission:

Born-again, baptized Christian in good standing at a local church  
Between college sophomore (by fall 2008) and 25 years of age -U.S.citizen or permanent U.S. resident of Korean descent  
\*we will be accepting a limited number of international students of Korean descent, but English language proficiency is a must  
Demonstrate strong leadership potential  
Have an outstanding academic record (minimum 3.0 GPA)<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Dr. Daniel Park. Script from Park’s video message.

Daniel Pak is a cross-cultural psychiatrist who works as a faculty member in the Psychology Department and Program in Intergroup Relations at the University of Michigan. He is a traveling speaker for JAMA. Park is one of the faculty members of GLDI.

GLDI illustrates how Korean American Christians integrate their social achievement into their Christian missions. Furthermore, through this process, they want to be part of the mainstream American society. The second generation Korean Americans promote their prides as competent Korean Americans who are qualified for becoming a leading group in America. This characteristic of the ministry reflect the wish of the first generation for the social success of their children as well as the expectation of the host society from them as a “model minority.”

In general, post-1965 Korean immigrants came to America for better lives and success. They refused to identify with other minority groups against the mainstream white people. Based on their Christian identity, Korean American Christians enjoy the analogical reading with American Puritans and redefine their destiny as a central group within American society through their material and social success.

Through GLDI I am being inspired to receive a healthy vision that is not self-glorifying. I desire to serve my generation to stand up and fight for the truth of Jesus Christ in this world. I know I am so incapable and don't have much to offer but I believe God uses the weak to shame the strong and as I rely on the power of the Holy Spirit I can be confident to do all things. I want to initiate and rise up with my generation to stand in the gap and pray for America, to bring about change in false ideologies, to bring about a new perspective of life that rejoices in the victory of Jesus Christ. Personally I would like to positively impact the Education System by achieving the highest degree at the best university to show the world that when God is with you there are no impossibilities!<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> <http://www.jamagldi.org/admissions.php>

UCLA graduate Jeea Yang, who attended 2007 GLDI, testified that she found her future visions through this program. However, she believed that her visions would be achieved through “the highest degree at the best university.”

## **V. CONCLUSION**

This chapter examined how Korean American Christians are positioning themselves in America. From their perspectives, America was God’s favorite country in the beginning thanks to the Puritan faith, but it gradually became a country of racial discrimination, moral corruption, and religious decay. As a reaction to this reality, their narratives contain wailing and warning about sinfulness of American societies and lead to their cry for repentance of Christians and call for spiritual awakening of the society. Then, they concluded with the emphasis on the roles of Korean American Christians as the second Puritans on their missions to purify America and restore God’s favor to it. Through these processes, Korean Americans promote their American identities as the second Puritans in America based on church-centered lives of Korean American communities.

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<sup>106</sup> Yang, Jeea. She graduated from UCLA.  
<http://www.jamaprayers.com/wp/jama-gldi-2007-student-testimonies/>

## **CHAPTER 5 THE CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION OF THE KOREAN AMERICAN CHURCHES**

For Korean Americans, the year 2003 was a centennial anniversary since the first Korean immigrants landed in Hawaii in 1903. Korean American communities celebrated the centennial year of their immigration in various events. This chapter will make a case study of the commemorative Centennial Celebration of the Korean American Church held in Los Angeles on November 9, 2003. The Centennial Celebration of the Korean American Church commemorated the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of the first Korean American Protestant church in 1903.

This Centennial Celebration was a religious event of Korean American Christians and took place predominantly in terms of the evangelical Christian vision of Korean Americans. The Korean Christian leaders of Los Angeles proposed and sponsored this Centennial Celebration for the purpose of celebrating the centennial year of the Korean American Protestant Church. This celebration became a good example of how Protestant leaders promoted Korean American identity through a religious celebration. The Christian symbols and narratives used in this centennial event demonstrate the process to establish what it means to be Korean Americans within the Korean American community. In other words, through this centennial event, Christian identity negotiated the conflicts between Korean ethnic backgrounds and the American national identity.

## **I. LITERATURE ON ETHNIC CELEBRATION EVENTS AND ETHNIC AMERICAN IDENTITY**

Ethnic festivals such as the Centennial Celebration serve as cases to show how immigrants create their own identities by participating in these particular events as both planners and audiences. In the studies of ethnic identity formation, there is a body of work which deals with festivals and commemorative events as crucial sites for participants to manifest and establish their identities. Scholars studying festivals and commemorative events as a part of ethnic identity studies, point out the significance of the studies of these events, in the sense that ethnic groups engage in the process of determining who can belong to which group and on what terms.

First of all, immigration historian John Bodnar suggested that commemorative celebrations are good examples of how “public memories” are constructed among the same ethnic groups, through the use of cultural symbols and rituals in celebrations. Bodnar emphasized the shaping of a public memory, as a way to constitute group identity; he defined a public memory as “a body of beliefs and ideas about the past that help a public or society understand both its past, present, and by implication, its future.”<sup>1</sup> Then, Bodnar exemplified his idea of creating a public memory to promote group identities of immigrants through commemorative events. For instance, Bodnar took the case of the commemorative

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<sup>1</sup> Bodnar, John. *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century*. Princeton, NJ : Princeton University Press. 1992. p.15

activities of Swedish Americans.<sup>2</sup> The first Swedish immigrants fled religious persecution in their homeland and settled in the prairie in Bishop Hill in western Illinois in the 1840s. Since then, the arrival of the first Swedish Americans in Bishop Hill has become the founding myth of Swedish Americans and they had had their commemorative activities till World War II.

In each commemorative activity, the story of the Bishop Hill settlement was used to express their deep respect for their immigrant pioneer standing for “ordinary people who overcame difficult problems of geography, climate, and politics and as such were always an inspiration to ordinary people who struggled with life in the present.”<sup>3</sup> A semicentennial celebration in 1896 formally marked the significance of the Bishop Hill settlement by dedicating a monument to the first Swedish immigrants. In addition, Bodnar cited the address of John Root who was born in Bishop Hill in 1849, as an example. Root honored the immigrants’ contribution and hardship and called Bishop Hill “the Scandivanican Plymouth Rock.”<sup>4</sup> According to Bodnar, even though the activities of the celebrations had been changed from the religious ceremonies to the more entertainment oriented activities such as parades, concerts and folk festivals, Swedish Americans continued to honor the first-generation pioneers. In Swedish Americans’ case, Bodnar showed how these ethnic groups tried to trace their group’s historical lineage

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<sup>2</sup> Bodnar illustrated the commemorative activities of four ethnic groups between the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century: Swedes, Norwegian, Mennonites and Irish.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p.44

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p.46

to their ancestors and immigrant pioneers as a way to construct the distinctive public memories through ethnic commemorative activities. He argued that this creation of their own public memories leads to the construction of ethnic group identity, by sharing and commemorating their unique past.

Historian of religion Robert Orsi also focuses on the significance of ethnic festivals as a way to see the process by which ethnic Americans are building their identity in America. In his book, *The Madonna of 115<sup>th</sup> Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880-1950*, Orsi made a case study of the annual festival of the Madonna of Mount Carmel on East 115th Street in New York City, one of the annual religious celebrations of Italian Americans. Orsi argued that a study of religious celebration reveals the people's perceptions, values, needs, and history within their religious practices and attitudes.<sup>5</sup> He also maintained that ethnic celebrations present how immigrants construct their unique group identities based on their particular ethnicity and immigrant experiences. According to Orsi, in ethnic celebrations, participants "revealed to themselves and to others who they were."<sup>6</sup> In addition, Orsi argued that ethnic celebration became the place for the immigrant generation to introduce their children to "their most fundamental

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<sup>5</sup> He called this aspect of religious studies as "a study of popular religion," defining the meaning of popular religion as "religion in the first sense, the rituals, symbols, prayers, and practices of the celebration, is unintelligible apart from religion in the second sense, as the people's deepest values and perceptions of reality" Orsi, Robert A. *The Madonna of 115<sup>th</sup> Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880-1950*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. 1985. p.xviii.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p.xviii.



perceptions of reality,” and to deal with the problems they have as immigrants in strange land based their common and unique value systems.<sup>7</sup>

Both Bodnar and Orsi focused on the functions of ethnic celebration in creating “public memory” based on unique histories and experience of each ethnic group. In both cases, immigrants used their ethnic celebrations for establishing group identities by publicizing “unique” elements not only to themselves but also to others. Therefore, they examined how immigrants have connected between the immigrants’ pre-immigrant memories and their new American identity in establishing the identities as ethnic Americans through their ethnic celebrations.

Japanese American historian Lon Kurashige and historian April Schultz more dealt with interaction of these ethnic festivals with the changing American social contexts. Kurashige showed the process of Japanese American identity formation by examining the transformation of Nisei Week Festivals. In his book, *Japanese American Celebration and Conflict: A History of Ethnic Identity and Festival, 1934-1990*, Kurashige dealt with the transformation of Japanese traditional festivals based on the change of historical realities around Japanese Americans and examined how Japanese Americans have obtained their group identities as Japanese Americans.<sup>8</sup>

Schultz studied a four day Norse-American Immigration Centennial Celebration in her article, “The Pride of the Race Had Been Touched?: The 1925

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p.xviii.

<sup>8</sup> Kurashige, Lon. *Japanese American Celebration and Conflict: A History of Ethnic Identity and Festival, 1934-1990*. Los Angeles: University of California Press. 2002.

Norse-American Immigration Centennial and Ethnic Identity.” The Celebration was held in the year after World War I in Minneapolis to commemorate the landing of the first immigrants from Norway in 1825. Schultz emphasized the characteristics of this Centennial Celebration in the context of the “Americanization” movement after World War I. Schultz analyzed how the Norse American community experienced the process of ethnic identity creation by responding to wartime nativism and post war Americanization movements by the resurgence of restriction movements among ethnic groups. In the Centennial events, Norse Americans employed a complex use of rituals and symbols. Schultz pointed out the significance of the study of Centennial Celebrations as a way to see ethnic identity formation process, saying that the 1925 Norse American Centennial Celebration embodied “all the tensions in the community over Americanization”<sup>9</sup> and that it served as a “strategic site” to show the creativity of ethnic identity as Norse Americans.

In addition, as a similar case study of the Centennial Celebration of Korean American Church, religious scholar Madeline Duntley dealt with the anniversary celebration of the Japanese ethnic church in her article, “Heritage, Ritual, and Translation; Seattle’s Japanese Presbyterian Church(JPC).” She analyzed JPC’s eighty-fifth anniversary celebration which was held on June 6, 1992. In her research, Duntley examined how JPC “forged a sense of corporate identity through

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<sup>9</sup> Schultz, April. “The Pride of the Race Had Been Touched?: The 1925 Norse-American Immigration Centennial and Ethnic Identity.” *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 77, No. 4 (Mar.1991):1265-1295. p.1276.

rituals such as commemorative worship gatherings.”<sup>10</sup> Duntley said that JPC tried to establish the Christian heritage of Japanese American history by merging the Japanese American past with biblical stories through commemorative religious rituals and worked to promote their ethnic identity in terms of Christian faith rather than ethnic ties. According to Duntley, a ritual such as a commemorative service is an example of how an ethnic community “understand(s) its past, and why it repeatedly enacts or performs it: as a blueprint for guiding its current mission outreach priorities and as a way of promoting community while preserving the generational, spiritual, ethnic, and linguistic diversity within its ranks.”<sup>11</sup>

This chapter will examine the Centennial Celebration of Korean American Protestant Churches as an example which presents how ethnic festivals and events contribute to the formation of ethnic identity as has been shown in the previously noted studies. I am concerned with the religious meanings that church leaders have produced within Korean immigrant churches, focusing on messages, sermons, prospectus papers, and letters, by church leaders and community leaders, as well as photos displayed during the Centennial Celebration. Through the Centennial Celebration, Korean American Christians have tried to make legitimate biblical settings for and religious explanations of Korean national history and immigrant experiences through this celebration. These religious discourses showed the process of the establishment of Korean ethnic solidarity based on Christianity.

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<sup>10</sup> Duntley, Madeline. “Heritage, Ritual, and Translation; Seattle’s Japanese Presbyterian Church.” Orsi, Robert A. ed. *Gods of the City : Religion and the American Urban Landscape*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press. 1999:289-309. p.289.

## II. THE CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION OF KOREAN AMERICAN PROTESTANT CHURCHES

### A. Planning

Korean Americans participated in this Celebration both as planners and audience members. *The Christian Herald USA*, one of the Korean American Christian weekly newspapers, headquartered in Los Angeles, initiated the idea of celebrating this centennial event on February of 2003. As the first step to put this idea into reality, Myeong-Kyun Kim, chairperson of *The Christian Herald USA*, advertised the purpose of this centennial celebration, by writing letters to church leaders and political dignitaries in and outside the United States.

In Kim's letter, he tried to convince the recipients of the significance of this celebration:

The year of 2003 is a very historic one not only for 2 million Korean-Americans but also for 70 million Koreans. The first group of immigrants from the Korean peninsula reached the Hawaiian Islands on January 13, 1903 and during the same year, the first Korean American churches were founded in San Francisco and Honolulu:<sup>12</sup>

Kim emphasized that the Korean immigrant history is important not only for Koreans in America but also for all Koreans in Korea. "70 million Koreans" in his letter included the population of both North Korea and South Korea. By calculating

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p.302.

<sup>12</sup> Kim, Myeong-Kyun, Invitation Letter. Proposal Papers of The Centennial Celebration of the Korean American church. *The Christian Today USA*, Feb. 21. 2003.

the total number of all Koreans, he used “Korean” as a term of ethnicity which meant more than a term of nationality.

After publicly initiating the plan of this centennial celebration, *The Christian Herald USA* led the selection of committee members among ministers in Korean immigrant churches in the Los Angeles area with the active support of The Council of Churches in Southern California, an ecumenical Korean American Protestant organization in Los Angeles. These two promoters headed the centennial organizing committees made up of church leaders and hundreds of volunteers from religious organizations in Southern California, such as The Council of Christian Churches in Southern California, The Association of Pastors in Southern California, and The Association of Elders in Southern California.

The organizing committees elicited financial support from Korean American businesses in the Los Angeles area. This support came from three main categories of sponsors. First of all, there were sponsors from newspapers such as *The Korea Times*(*Hanguk Ilbo USA*) and *Korea Central Daily*(*Joongang USA*). Both newspapers were American branches of Korean newspapers headquartered in Seoul, South Korea. The secondary sponsors were Korean American enterprises. They were mainly Korean language broadcasting companies, which were on air in the cities with the large Korean American communities such as New York and Los Angeles. They included Gospel Broadcasting Co. of America, Radio Korea, Radio Seoul, KTAN, Korean Television Enterprise (KTE), Christian TV, and The Christian Broadcasting Co. of America. These companies have their own cable

channels and broadcast the programs in Korean for Korean immigrants. They included various Christian related programs such as sermons, Christian music and recorded worship services of the big Korean American churches. These broadcasting companies were running their businesses, depending on the maintenance of Korean American communities, so they actively supported Korean American centennial events.

Another main group of sponsors of this Centennial Celebration was voluntary non-profit Christian organizations which mainly performed their functions in Korea. They were generally interdenominational Christian organizations. They expected the events to be the impetus to revitalize Christianity both in America and Korea. They included The National Council of Churches in Korea, Korea National Prayer Breakfast, The World Holy Spirit Movement Associations, Inc., The World Holy Spirit Evangelization Crusade, The Christian Council of Korea and The National Unification and Evangelization Associations.

Based on this financial and spiritual support from various sources in and outside the United States, the organizing committees founded the Centennial Commemorative Society of the Founding of the Korean American Church in February of 2003 and located its temporary office in the building of *The Christian Herald USA* in Los Angeles Korea Town. This organization elected Rev. Dong-Sun Lim, a pastor emeritus of the Oriental Mission church in Los Angeles as chair.

Under the leadership of Rev. Lim, the planners agreed upon the official objectives of this centennial celebration. They abstracted their objectives into four slogans of this Centennial Celebration which were Honor, Reconcile, Celebrate,

and Bless. Based on these four slogans, they made all the advertising materials such as Centennial posters and pamphlets. Honor meant the connection of the immigration history to their Korean pasts by honoring the Korean ancestors and immigrant pioneers. Reconcile represented both generational and interethnic reconciliation. Celebrate and Bless stood for the visions for the rise of Korean American culture and identity by unifying Korean Americans in terms of Christian evangelical missions in America. What each represents demonstrates the planners' intention to create ethnic memories as a way to establish group identity as ethnic Koreans and to project future visions as Korean Americans through evangelical Christian missions.

## **B. Organization of the Celebration**

The Centennial Celebration, which began when the Korean Americans gathered at the Los Angeles City Hall on August 15th in order to celebrate the 58th anniversary of Korean Independence from the yoke of Japanese colonial rule, will end beyond the Grand Festival when all mother churches of the 50 states thank the Lord for his blessing and grace.<sup>13</sup>

The Centennial celebration had two major events. Centennial Committees held the ceremony commemorating the fifth eighth anniversary of Korean Independence Day at Los Angeles City Hall on August 15, 2003 and the Grand Festival on November 9 of the same year. This celebration was not only an ethnic

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<sup>13</sup> The Official Project Paper presented by *The Christian Herald USA*. No. 130. The Theme of the Event.

festival but also a Christian event. Therefore, the symbols and narratives used in this celebration attempted to connect Christianity to both Korean ethnic identity and American identity.

In this celebration, Korean American Christian religious leaders traced the history of Korean immigration back to the beginning of Korean Protestantism influenced by American missionaries. Also they honored the contributions and central roles of Korean American ethnic churches in immigration history. Therefore, this celebration intended to show a historical continuation between Korean Christian history in the early 20th century and the constitution of Korean American communities centered on with the Christian churches.

In addition, this celebration aimed at the formation of a sense of group solidarity within Korean American communities based on Christian faith, despite the inner diversity within Korean American churches including generational differences. It makes Korean Americans successfully “assume an identity that is pluralist, multidimensional”<sup>14</sup> while remaining rooted in its Korean American ethnic historical identification. By celebrating this diversity itself, this kind of ethnic ritual pursues a recognition and connection to American society which is presumed to be multiracial and multicultural.

The major role of commemoration is to give future visions and prospectus by emphasizing the significant roles of Korean American Christians among Korean Americans as a community. Their unique ethnic background became a factor to

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<sup>14</sup> Duntley, Madeline. *Op. Cit.*, p.303.



celebrate and to give them special missions as Korean American Christians in America. This commemorative celebration presents how Korean American Christians understand the past, and how it functions as “a blueprint for guiding its current mission outreach priorities and as a way of promoting community while preserving the generational, spiritual, ethnic, and linguistic diversity within its ranks.”<sup>15</sup> As a result, the commemorative celebration suggests common visions for Christian missions and stresses inevitable destinies of Korean Americans, transcending their particular ethnic backgrounds through universal Christianity.

### **III. CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION AND KOREAN AMERICAN IDENTITY**

#### **A. Photo Displays**

The centennial offered an opportunity to use the vernacular memory of the pioneer immigrants to reaffirm values that were crucial to the maintenance of ethnic institutions and communal life and to express pride in the achievements of ancestors.<sup>16</sup>

Korean American Christian leaders used the achievements of the Korean immigrant pioneers who founded the first Korean American Protestant churches as a means to stress the significance of Christian churches for the maintenance of their ethnic identity. One of the major narratives in this Centennial event was to

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 302.

<sup>16</sup> Bodnar, John. *Op. Cit.*, p. 61.

emphasize the central roles of Protestant churches in Korean immigrant history. In the official letter, the Centennial committees stated that the objective for this celebration was to appreciate the contributions of Korean American churches in Korean immigration history:

This year is a very historical one for all of us because it is the centennial of the Korean immigration to America and of the founding of the Korean American church. Our Christian Church has lived at the heart of the Korean American community and functioned as its center and the provider of comfort, courage and hope for its members and neighbors in times of hardship and crisis. Therefore, the Korean American community would not have survived without the leadership and service of its Christian Church.<sup>17</sup>

The central roles of Christian churches in Korean immigrant communities become agents connecting Korean American history to Korean Protestant history. This celebration emphasized how Christianity was closely engaged in the development of modern Korea through American missionaries. Then, the Korean American communities centered on Christian churches were legacies of American missionaries in Korea. Through these narratives making connection between Korean Christian history and Korean immigrant history, this celebration defined the communal boundaries and bonds among Korean Americans based on Christianity.

About five hundred photos displayed in the lobby of the Los Angeles Convention Center illustrate the process of promoting ethnic identity based on

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<sup>17</sup> Official Proposal Packet. Prospectus

Korean Christianity.<sup>18</sup> Photos were chronologically displayed on hard boards with particular themes and explanations of each photo. For instance, in the picture board under the title “Syngman Rhee, The First President of the Republic of Korea.,” (figure1) Photo display committees put the picture of the English Bible which Rhee used in the bottom to emphasize his Christian background.

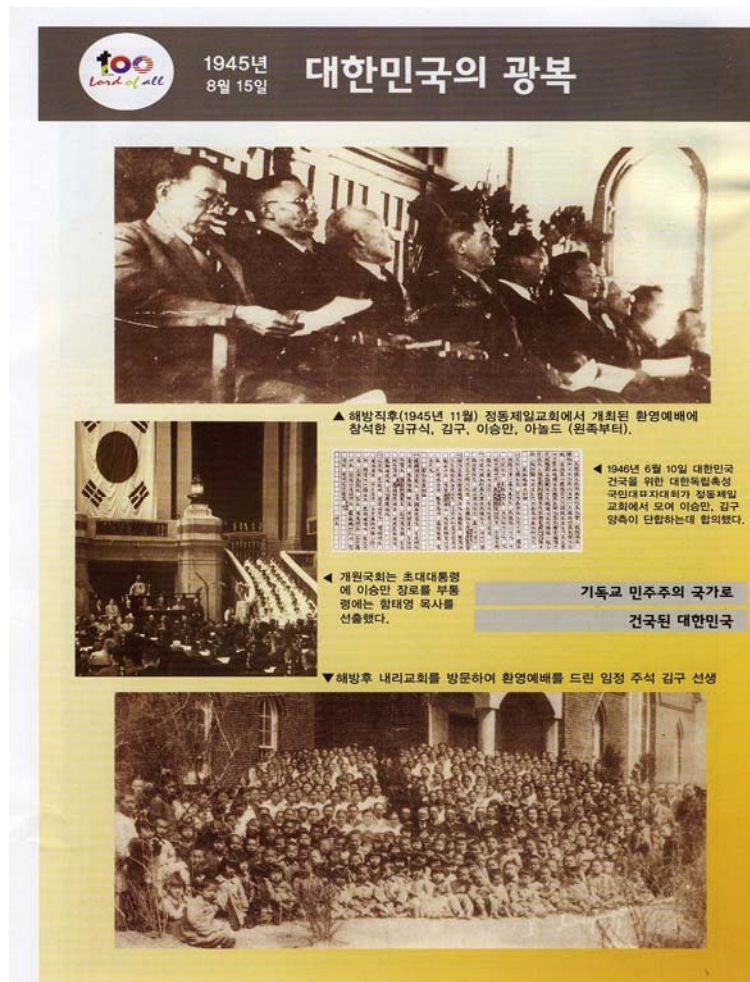


<Figure 1> Syngman Rhee, The First President of the Republic of Korea

<sup>18</sup> In 2006, *The Christian Herald USA* published the series: *Koreans in North America: A Pictorial History –Rainbow over the Pacific* which was composed of three volumes and included collections of photos displayed during the celebration.

There was an explanation beside the picture: “The Bible which made Syngman Rhee convert to Christianity.” Committees also added the comment about how much Rhee was actively involved in Christianity, saying “Syngman Rhee led Bible study groups even when he was in prison and evangelized over forty prisoners,” and that his Bible study became the first bible study in prison in the history of Korean Christianity. Rhee was used as a symbolic figure establishing a close tie between Korean national history and Christianity. In this photo display of the foundation of South Korea, planners created a connection between Christianity and modern Korean history, based on the election of the Christian president in the modern Korean government.

In addition to the emphasis on the Christian background of the first Korean president, there are two more examples from photo collections illustrating how the Centennial planners tried to make a historical connection between Christianity and modern Korean history and emphasized Christian engagement in the development of Korea.



< Figure 2 Korean Independence >

The photo on the top: Kyu-Shik Kim, Ku Kim, Syngman Rhee, and Arnold who attended welcoming services held in Jung Dong First Methodist Church in November of 1945, right after independence from Japan.

The photo in the middle: The first representative assembly elected the first president of the Republic of Korea, Elder Syngman Rhee and the first vice-president, Rev. Tai -Young Ham.

The photo on the bottom: Ku Kim, president of the Korean provisional government during Japanese occupation, attending welcoming services at Naeri Church after Korean independence.

Figure 2 is a picture board entitled, “Korean Independence,” which displayed photos of the establishment of the South Korean government in 1948. In this picture board, the subtitle in the middle explicitly connects Korean national history and Christianity: “The Republic of Korea established based on Christian Democracy.” “Christian Democracy” meant that South Korea was a Christian country, which was not true. In addition, the description of the photo in the middle used the titles used for Christian leaders in a Presbyterian Protestant Church, such as *Moksa* (Reverend) and *Jangno* (Elder) to address political leaders including president and vice president.

In addition, this collection included the pictures of the worship services and Christian churches where Korean political leaders in the first government participated. Under the strong influence of America in the establishment of democratic government in South Korea, early Korean early political leaders had American backgrounds which were closely connected to Christianity. “Christian democracy” is a false term used to overemphasize Christian influence on Korean history.

Also there were Korean national political heroes who were affiliated with Korean Protestant churches in America. They were active Christians and stayed in the United States to participate in Independence movements in the early twentieth century. Syngman Rhee was a key figure in the sense that he was educated in Hawaii and in California and was actively involved in Korean American churches. Chang-Ho Ahn and Yong-Man Park in the photographs played similar roles to Syngman Rhee. These pictures of Korean national heroes who were actively

involved in Korean immigrant churches in the beginning of Korean immigrant history were considered to be good examples of making a connection between the history of Korean American history and Korean national history.

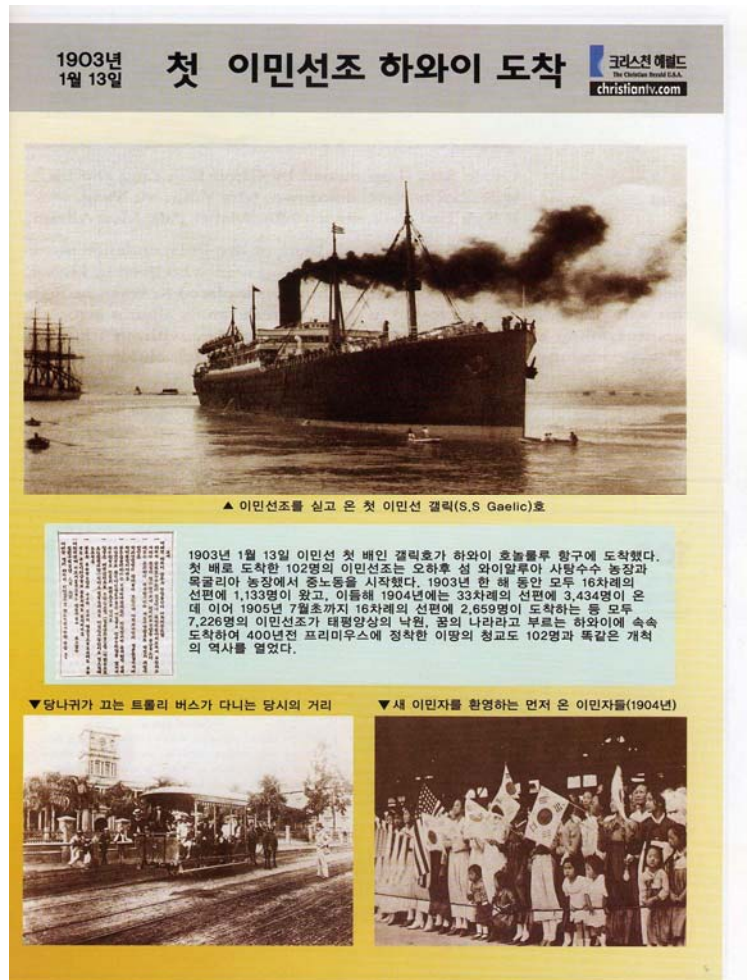
Among the picture boards, there were ten boards displayed under the title of “The pioneers of Korean American History.” These boards primarily included Korean Christian intellectuals in America who had sponsored Korean independence. Interestingly, the photos of American missionaries in Korea were selected under this title. The picture boards displayed the photos of American missionaries such as Henry. G. Appenzeller and Horace G. Underwood as pioneers of Korean immigration history.(Figure 3) They worked primarily in Korea during the early twentieth century. Therefore, these photos emphasized the American legacy of Korean American immigration, connecting between American missionaries and the development of Korean American churches.





Korean immigration, Centennial organizers tried a connection of their immigrant history to America for promoting their American national identities.

One of the rhetorical strategies to construct the American national identity based on Korean ethnic background is an analogy between the Korean Americans and the American Puritans. One of the major photo collection boards about the first arrival of Korean immigrants in Hawaii illustrated this purpose.(Figure 4)



<Figure 4: The First Arrival of Korean Immigrants in Hawaii >

There were four pictures displayed on this board. The photo on the top was the *SS Gaelic*, which was the first ship of Korean immigrants. The two on the bottom were about the streets in Hawaii in 1903 and the earlier Korean immigrants who were welcoming the new immigrants. The one in the middle was a picture of announcement of the sugar labor recruitment in Korea in 1902.

The *SS Gaelic*, that brought the first Korean Americans symbolized the inception of Korean American histories. The image of the ship *SS Gaelic* provides a source for making a parallel between Korean immigration and the Puritans who came to America on the *Mayflower*. The caption on this board explicitly shows this analogy.

The *SS Gaelic*, the first ship of Korean immigrants, arrived at Honolulu, Hawaii on January 13, 1903. The first 102 Korean immigrants started severe labors at Wailuku and Mokuleia sugar plantations in Oahu. In the same year, 1,113 Korean came to Hawaii on 16 ships and 3,434 more the next year, 1904, on 33 ships. By July of 1905, 7,226 Korean immigrant ancestors had arrived in Hawaii which they called as a paradise in the Pacific and a dream country. The total included 2,659 who came in 1905. They opened a new frontier history just like 101 Puritans in Plymouth four hundreds years ago.

With the parallel between the two groups, the ship in the photo brought up the images of “Puritans in Plymouth four hundreds year ago.” The American Puritans in Plymouth were religious groups and lived centered on Christian churches. Therefore, in photo displays, the common Christian background was an agent to promote the American national identity of Korean Americans as descendents of American Puritans in the sense of the identical religious background.

## B. Grand Festivals

The Grand Festival of the Centennial Celebration of the Korean American church was held on November 9, 2003 in the Los Angeles Convention Center. Beginning at 5 in the afternoon, the celebration lasted over six hours. This celebration set a record for attendance at an event organized by Korean immigrants. More than eighteen thousand participated in addition to over two thousand choir members from Church United Choir, Southern California Elder Choir and Kids Choir(God's Image).<sup>19</sup>

The Grand Festival was a hybrid of Korean and American elements. The two hosts of the festival accentuated the cross-cultural nature of the event. A male anchor, Hyeong-Gyun No and a female anchor, Yoo-Bin Kang emceed the festival. He was wearing a nice Tuxedo, speaking Korean, while she was wearing colorful *Han-Bok*, a Korean traditional outfit, taking charge of English translation. They took turns hosting the festival throughout the celebration.

The Grand Festival began with the singing both the Korean and American national anthems. In addition, on one side of the stage there was an American national flag, star and strips and on the other side, a Korean national flag, *Taegeukgi*. The stage was full of hundreds of choir members which were composed mostly of the first generation Korean Americans. They were singing Korean songs. There was a large orchestra which was composed of non-Koreans even though

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<sup>19</sup> <http://www.kachurch100.com/sub-06-01.htm>

there were as some Korean American members. They remained on the stage throughout the celebration, playing music or just clapping their hands while other musicians were performing on stage.

In addition to Korean performances including Korean traditional dances and songs, the participation of the non-Korean performers was a crucial scene in the Grand Festival. They were mostly well-known American evangelical Christian musicians with whom the young Korean Americans were familiar. The organizers intentionally tried to invite American evangelical musicians, advertised the participation of American musicians, and invited the American full time worship leaders. They wanted to include mainstream Americans because the purpose of this celebration was to reconcile Korean and American identity.

Throughout the festival, Tom Brooks, a well known American Christian producer, arranger, and keyboardist, took charge in directing the bands, representative contemporary American evangelical Christian musicians, Michito Sanchez, on percussion, Paul Jackson Jr. on electric guitar, Abraham Laboriel on bass guitar and Carl Albrecht on drums. Brooks and Albrecht worked with Integrity Music, one of the biggest Christian media communications companies along with Vineyard Music and Hosanna Music.”<sup>20</sup>

Three American worship leaders, Tommy Walker, Paul Baloche and Lenny LeBlanc, led the praise and worship in the Reconciliation session. They were active American Christian worship leaders in American evangelical organizations such as

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<sup>20</sup> Pamphlet of the Centennial Celebration, Cast profiles. II.

Promise Keepers, InterVarsity, Integrity Music and Maranatha Music, which have influenced the religious beliefs and practices of American born second generations of Korean Americans. Tommy Walker has led worship for Promise Keepers, Harvest Crusades, CA Worship Band, Youth With A Mission, and Get Down Ministries, all of which were American evangelical organizations. The invitation of these American evangelical Christian leaders and their participation in the Grand Festival, demonstrated the influence of American evangelicalism on the second generation Korean Americans.

By adopting American evangelical ways of worshipping, this centennial attempted to integrate the two different identities based on Christianity.

### **C. Messages.**

The organizers were not seeking to maintain the community's marginality but through ritual celebration, they were seeking to construct an ethnic identity that would place them at the very center of American culture.<sup>21</sup>

The Centennial Celebration of Korean American churches aimed at declaring the central roles of Korean Americans in American societies in terms of their Christian evangelical missions. The promotion of American identity was also presented in the messages, sermons and addresses spoken and written by Korean American religious leaders and celebrities during the celebration. In this Centennial event, organizers and participants emphasized the significant roles of Korean

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<sup>21</sup> Schultz, April. *Op., Cit.*, p.1281

American Christians in America and the world as leading Christians. In this sense, this narrative promotes the central roles of Korean Americans in American society, rather than remaining marginalized as a racial and ethnic minority group.

For example, Rev. Jeong-Hyeon Oh, the former senior pastor of *Sarang Church*<sup>22</sup> in Anaheim, California, preached the significance of Korean American churches in world history as well as American society in his celebrating message. He pointed to the central roles of Korean American churches in world evangelicalism:

I congratulate on the centennial year of Korean American churches which started with the first immigrants arriving in Hawaii 100 years ago. As a person who served in Korean American church for over twenty years, I have no doubt that Korean American church will take roles in leading world Evangelical missions.

As the descendents of European immigrants in America prevented the decline of Christianity in Europe which had started in the mid 20th century, five-million eight-hundred thousand Korean immigrants spreading throughout 178 countries in the world, are expected to take their roles in world missions in the 21st century. Furthermore, among Korean immigrant churches in the world, Korean American churches are playing central roles in the mission. I expect Korean American churches not only to challenge the Korean churches which tend to stagnate but also, through the burgeoning spiritual power, to influence American churches which are losing their powers.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Sarang Church has over 8,000 members ranking 49 in the fastest growing churches in America this year.

<sup>23</sup> Rev. Jeong Hyeon Oh. *The Congratulatory Message*

Oh's message exemplified the narrative that Korean American should take over world missions for the future as America has performed during the twentieth century. His messages analyzed that European immigrants came to America to keep their Christian faith and emphasized American active world missionary work in the twentieth century by these European Americans. Then, he said that Korean American Christians' roles for the next century, was to inherit the roles of European Americans in America, in terms of Christian evangelical mission. This also shows that organizers tried to place Korean Americans in a central position in American society through being Christians.

Another example of promoting American identity using Christian narratives is a sermon by Rev. Dong-Sun Lim during the Grand Festival. Rev. Lim gave his special sermon, *A Message for the Immigrants*. In the Bible story he cited, God's people of southern Judah was invaded by northern Babylonians resulting in many deaths and destruction. And the remainder were captured and lived in a foreign country. During the period of their captivity, the Israelites had to endure exploitation of hard physical labor and were weary in great distress. God sent a message of comfort and hope to the Israelites through the Prophet Jeremiah when they suffered from their lives as captives in a foreign land.

In his sermon, Lim applied the message of Jeremiah toward the Israelites to the present situations and future of Korean immigrants. Through his sermons, Lim argued that all Koreans are destined to immigrate to America and God has plans for Korean immigrants in America, a country founded by immigrants. Therefore, by providing a Biblical answer to how immigrants live in foreign lands, he believed



that Korean Americans were to be models for other minority groups by their Christian religious faith.

He said, “In fact, this land, United States of America, is not the land of American Indians, nor of the whites, but of God. It is the land of dreamers from all over the world. Today, there are over 400 different nationalities living across the United States.”<sup>24</sup> Therefore, he preached that Korean immigrants and descendents should love America as their home, by citing the Biblical scripture, “Build houses and settle down: plant gardens and eat what they produce”(Jeremiah 29:5) Lim said, that God commanded immigrants to love the land in which they live. Lim described the situations of the Israelites in the Bible:

Being brought as captives and treated as second class citizens, they were forced to work and live like animals on the threshold of society. And because of their miserable circumstances, they had no love for the land: therefore they had no desire to build houses nor plant gardens nor trees. But at that very moment, God told them to love the land, to build houses, and to enjoy the fruit of their crops. As a human being, if you love where you live, that becomes your second homeland:

In this message, Lim stressed the loyalty to America by citing a Biblical story. To have American national identity is what God wants, according to Lim.

Furthermore, as one way of loving the land they live, he even encouraged interracial marriage. He suggested examples from the Bible and Korean respectable heroes including Rev. Kyung-Jik Han. Rev. Han was one of the most prestigious

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<sup>24</sup> Commemorative Sermon by Rev. Dong Sun Lim. *A Message for the Immigrants*. On Nov. 9 2003.

and respectable Presbyterian pastors in Korean Christian history. Han studied at Princeton and had served as the senior pastor in Youngnak Presbyterian church in Korea.

The captive Israelites in Babylon did not want to marry the natives of that land. To them, the Babylonians were gentiles, one who served idols, and enemy of their homeland; ‘how can we marry and establish relationship with them?’ they said, and had largely ignored them. But God told them to marry them to be fruitful and to multiply through them. To most Israelites, it is common for them to marry their own people. However, there are cases such as Joseph’s marriage to an Egyptian woman, Moses to a Medianite, Esther to a Persian, and Eunice, mother of Timothy, to a Greek.

In Korea, the son of Rev. Kyung-Jik Han had married an American woman, and the son of the coach Hyung-Gi Yoo had international marriage. Based on these instances, it is not shameful to have international or transnational marriage. And at the same time, I’m not advocating international marriages either. Koreans should marry within themselves but always open the option or possibility of marrying other nationalities if the need arises. And while international marriage can bring joy and satisfaction to the parties involved, more likely than not, they will have estranged relationship with their parents and relatives. Moreover, they open the possibility of losing their own national heritage.<sup>25</sup>

Lim concluded his sermon by suggesting the future mission as model immigrants here in America.

We ought to remember these words of God, and as we look towards next 100 years or 200 years anniversary, it is my hope and prayer that we may become the model immigrants to other people and pioneers to our future generations.

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<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*

His sermon illustrated how Christian church leaders project the place of Korean Americans within America. Through celebrating the central roles of Christianity in Korean American past, present and future, church leaders elicited the concept that Korean Americans are destined to take over the central roles in American society for the next century. As long as they devoted their lives and vision to Christianity, they are chosen as a central race in every place, including America. In addition, Korean American roles are even more crucial because America has been the most powerful country in the past one hundred years, and the immigrants in America will inherit America's missions for world evangelization. .

Rev. Yong-Weon Lee from the *Hanbit* Holiness Church in New York also emphasized the significance of immigrant status of Korean Americans in his congratulating messages entitled *Hoping that the Last will be First*. According to Lee, Korean Americans came to America to repay American missionaries who came to Korea 130 years ago by restoring the early Puritan Christianity in America. The destiny of Korean Americans is to serve as a "guardian of American spirits" in the country where "Puritanism and Christian culture are withering."

Korean Protestant churches have achieved outstanding global growth since American missionaries introduced Protestantism to Koreans 130 years ago. Then, Korean immigrants brought their passionate Protestant faith to America where Puritanism and Christian culture are withering. Korean American churches are paying the gospel debts they have to American missionaries by serving a guardian of American spirits. They are also restoring what it means to be Americans in the traditional Puritan sense.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Rev. Lee, Yong-Weon. "Hoping that the last will be first." *Christian Herald*, Oct. 30. p.15

How is this possible? According to Lee, it is possible because “God’s chosen people were immigrants” based on the Biblical stories, and the great people grow “outside their homelands.”

God chooses people He favors and trains them through trials and tribulations. There is no exception that God’s chosen people were immigrants who left their hometowns, relatives and their father’s houses. Abraham, Moses, Jacob, Joseph, David, the twelve disciples and Paul all left their homes and became God’s great people by depending only on God and keeping their faith in His promise despite loneliness and continuous suffering. Then, this fact in the Bible tells us that His great people grow outside their homelands, rather than within their homelands.<sup>27</sup>

Lee’s interpretation explicitly proclaims that immigrant experiences are the ways to obtain God’s favor.

In addition, Lee lifted up the status of Korean immigrants within American society. Lee’s message was based on the parable of Jesus about the workers of the vineyard in the New Testament.<sup>28</sup> In this parable, the landowner was looking for

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Matthew 20:16.

In the Bible, Matthew 20:1-16. there is Jesus’ parable of the workers in the vineyard. 1 “For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard. 2 He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard. 3 “About the third hour he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. 4 He told them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ 5 So they went. “He went out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour and did the same thing. 6 About the eleventh hour he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, ‘Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?’ ” 7 ‘Because no one has hired us,’ they answered. “He said to them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard.’ 8 “When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.’ 9 “The workers who were hired about the eleventh hour came and each received a denarius. So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. 10 When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. 12 ‘These men who were hired last worked only one hour,’ they said, ‘and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.’ 13 “But he answered one of them, ‘Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius? 14 Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I

workers in his vineyard all day long. He hired workers wandering the street and sent them to his vineyard. Some workers began to work from early in the morning and others from the afternoon. However, the landowner paid the same wages to everyone. Then, people who were hired first complained to the landowner for paying the same to those who were hired last. Then, he answered, “the last will be first and the first will be last.”

Lee paralleled the workers in the vineyard to immigrants in America. Korean immigrants were workers who were hired last based on their shorter immigrant history relative to other ethnic groups.

We have shorter immigrant history than other ethnic groups. However, we are like workers who were hired in the evening. If we work hard and sincerely, we can expect great blessing and Grace that the last will be first as in the Bible: The landowner paid in turn from the last ones hired to the first ones. Through this Centennial Celebration, I hope we will have faith that people who can achieve Korean unification and world peace, as Joseph saved his family, are growing among us, Korean Americans.<sup>29</sup>

In the Bible, the implication of this parable is about the message of salvation through God’s grace, not through human’s efforts. However, Lee applied this parable in the contradictory way. Lee implied that if you work hard and sincerely, you will get God’s grace and God will make you rise above the other groups. In addition, Lee’s mentioning of Korean unification and world peace is out of place in this Korean American immigrants’ centennial context. Lee just intended to

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gave you. 15 Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous? 16"So the last will be first, and the first will be last."

<sup>29</sup> Rev. Lee, Yong-Weon. *Op. Cit.*

highlight how important Korean Americans are within the global context, beyond their minority status in America.

In addition to the emphasis on immigrant generations, the celebration is projecting the future of the second generation Korean Americans. Korean Americans have hopes and dreams for the next generation who is fluent in English and more eligible to be “Americans” than their parents’ generation. Korean immigrants came to America for their children in the first place and expected their children to be more accepted into American mainstream society. For that purpose, they sacrificed themselves to educate their children to get professional jobs and fulfill the dream of middle class lives for which their parents had longed. The congratulating message of Rev. Sam-Hwan Kim is confirming that the dream of Korean immigrants is to be “Americans.” Even though it does not come true in their generation, their expectation is still to be “a central group of mainstream American society.”

They grew up supported by the prayers with tears and love from their parents and the second and third generation will be competent enough to lead the next 100 years as a central group of mainstream American society based on their firm faith inherited from their parents.<sup>30</sup>

#### IV. CONCLUSION.

In the centennial event, the expectation of Korean Americans' contribution to America through their Christian fervor is the central concept of Korean American identity. These strategies point to the goal of ethnic celebration for the purpose of overcoming their marginal status and the insecure feeling by the disconnection both from Korea and America. This celebration praised an image of "model minority" in American society not based on economic success, but on being true Christians. Therefore, Korean Americans want to be more American than the previous Americans through their religious faith.

The appreciation of the past contribution of Korean immigrant churches to Korean history and the expectation of future roles of Korean Americans may bridge the differences not so much between Korea and America, as between the immigrant generation and American born generations. In this identity formation process, Christian rhetoric and narrative have provided the legitimate frameworks for Korean Americans and this centennial celebration illustrated this process within in the forms of sermons, performances, and exhibitions.

Therefore, in the Centennial celebration, the Protestant narratives of Korean American Protestant leaders constitute Korean American identity as God's Chosen

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<sup>30</sup> Rev. Kim, Sam-Hwan. *The Congratulatory message*. Rev. Kim is the senior pastor of Seoul Myung-Sung Church.

people and this idea still maintains Korean national identities and at the same time, confirms their American national identity.



## CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION

My dissertation, *God's Chosen People: Protestant Narratives of Korean Americans and American National Identity*, is about the examination of Protestant narratives of Korean Americans, with regard to the formation of what it means to be "Americans." The focus of my project is to find out how Korean Americans have articulated what it means to be Korean Americans based on the concept that they are God's chosen people in religious terms. They use this concept for distinguishing themselves not only from Koreans but other ethnic groups in America.

My dissertation examined how Protestant narratives provide the framework for Korean immigrants to understand their transnational experiences and immigrant lives as Korean Americans. Korean American Protestant leaders have played significant roles in the lives of the immigrants. Their religious messages reflected the ideal image of America and comforted their current status as a minority within the context of the Biblical narratives and faith. For this purpose, my research focused on the study of religious literature such as sermons and religious writings within Korean American Protestant churches in the Los Angeles area after the large wave of Korean immigration after 1965.

My personal experiences in Korean American ethnic churches influenced the start of my project. As a Protestant Christian and a regular church attendee, I had many opportunities to listen to the religious messages in the Korean American

Protestant churches. Then, I became interested in the fact that Korean American Christian messages are not very different from the early American Puritans in the sense that they believe that they are selected by God and He sent Koreans to America for His special purposes.

These questions developed with my interests in the religious interpretations of the particular racial and ethnic groups with regard to their American identities. The Puritans in the early seventeenth century believed they were God's people who were sent to this new land to build a Christian nation. The African Americans believed that they were freed by God from slavery and selected to fulfill God's plans. Mormons portrayed themselves pilgrims in the wilderness as God's chosen people as well. These kinds of messages reinterpreted their distinctive situations and their immigrant experiences within the context of Biblical frameworks. In other words, religious narratives of each group "treat cultural distinctness as the primary context of their theological reading of America,"<sup>1</sup> as Japanese American theologian Fumitaka Matsuoka defined. Through their interpretations, they should belong to a certain group to fulfill God's purposes in America.

When I started researching, I was so surprised that there are so many scholarly works on Korean American Protestant churches. Maybe this fact demonstrates what central functions Korean American Protestant churches are playing in Korean American communities. Probably it is natural to become curious

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<sup>1</sup> Matsuoka, Fumitaka. "Introduction." Fernandez, Eleazar S. & Fumitaka Matsuoka. ed. *Realizing the America of Our Hearts: Theological Voices of Asian Americans*. St. Louis, Missouri; Chalice Press. 2003.:1-8. p.3

about why and also what is happening inside these ethnic churches. Most studies have focused on how much the churches are contributing to the maintenance of Korean ethnicity through participation in the churches. However, even if Korean American churches having strong characteristics as ethnic institutions in America, people still have strong religious motivations. They come to churches because they are comfortable speaking Korean, eating Korean food, and having fellowship with other Korean Americans. In addition to that, they are seeking the meanings of their lives through their religious faith as Christians. In this sense, I started examining how they are developing religious meanings as Korean Americans and connecting these meanings to becoming Americans.

In my dissertation, my basic premise is that post-1965 Korean immigrants came to America for material success and better educational opportunities. Korean Americans are one of the new immigrant groups in America who have entered in large numbers as the result of the Immigration Reform Act of 1965. Post-1965 Korean immigrants came to America primarily to improve their socioeconomic status and to obtain a higher standard of living than they had in their homeland. In addition, occasionally, although they were enjoying middle-class lives and high-skilled professions<sup>2</sup>, they ventured to cross the Pacific to give their children better educational opportunities due to the trauma of college entrance examination

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<sup>2</sup> According the research, almost half of the Korean immigrants over 25(44%) were college graduates. This is higher rate of the native-born Americans(24%) as well as the general population of Korea(14%). Furthermore, majority of Korean immigrants(86%) graduated from high school. Reimer, Dana G. "Korean Culture and Entrepreneurship" Miyares, Ines M. & Christopher A. Airriess. ed. *Contemporary Ethnic Geographies in America*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 2006: 233-250. p.239.

competition, even after South Korea had achieved economic prosperity enough to provide the same level of living conditions as America.

Even if Korea was not colonized by America, the unilateral influences on Korean modernization developed so-called cultural colonial mentality among Koreans. They had hierarchical perceptions of Korea-America relations. Furthermore, Korean racial perceptions have been limited to white supremacy ideology. These pre-immigrant perceptions influenced the post-immigrant lives of Korean Americans. They tried every possible effort to make it, in America. In my understanding of immigrant lives of Korean Americans, whatever they are doing, their final goal is to be part of the “good side” of America, especially in a material sense.

Korean American immigration is one of the outcomes of the globalization phenomenon. Korean Americans would not have considered leaving their countries without the disparate conditions between America and their homelands within the global capitalist economy. Through their difficult experiences as a minority group in America, Korean Americans are trying to revitalize themselves and generate their own version of the American Dream. Most of all, the Korean version of the American Dream is the belief that hard work with strong will is a simple way of achieving economic success.

I believe that my analysis of Protestant narratives of Korean American Christians demonstrates this argument. The close examination of their narratives presents how Korean American Christians view America and perceive themselves within the context of their religious faith, by reinterpreting their ethnic backgrounds

and immigrant experiences. As I discussed in my dissertation, Koreans do not have a clear idea about multiracial society because Korea is a racially, culturally and linguistically homogeneous country. So, in this process, they tend to make sense of racial diversity in a hierarchical way and are pursuing to be on top of it by achieving social success. Through the religious motivations, they divide the society into Korean Americans, majority of whom are Christians, versus America which is not Christian enough. Their role model group is not the minority groups who came to America earlier than them, but the early Puritans who do not exist any more. In other words, Korean Americans are pursuing mainstream status rather than minority group status.

In fact, my study provided a critical intervention in the panethnicity model that dominates Asian American identity studies. Asian Americans can be one group only from non-Asian perspectives. My research showed how Korean American Christians perceive themselves based on their unique ethnic backgrounds and histories beyond the Asian American identities. They understand themselves within the contexts of transnational relations between Korea and America and their conservative evangelical Protestant faith. Therefore, my research demonstrated how Korean Americans integrate their ethnic identity and their American national identity, not Asian American identity.

In addition, in my work, I made no stereotypical division between traditional Korean culture and Protestantism, criticizing a popular stereotype that Confucianism represents Korea while Protestantism represents America. I expected my research to demonstrate how Protestantism plays a role as an agency conveying

American values, including racial and ethnic ideas and influences the racial and ethnic identity of Korean Americans. Furthermore, this dissertation endeavored to show how an ethnic group composed of immigrants is creating their own providential destiny as Americans through Protestantism. Therefore, I hope my project will suggest an innovative manner to examine other ethnic Americans, in terms of the role of religion in the process of racial and ethnic identity formation.

From Korean American Christians' points of view, God chose America in the seventeenth century and enormously blessed it as His second Chosen People after the Jews. However, they lost their favor because of their increasing atheistic attitudes. Then, Korean American Christians are here to help America to regain God's favor and the distinctively church-centered Korean American communities manifest this destiny according to the assertion of Korean American Christian leaders. Whether their belief is theologically right or how much their belief has been realized in America, is not an issue in this dissertation. Instead, the issue in this dissertation is that these narratives have been accepted and repeated among Korean American Christians as a way to construct their American identity with their distinct Korean ethnicity.

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